





304



THE WOUNDED FOOT. Page 24.

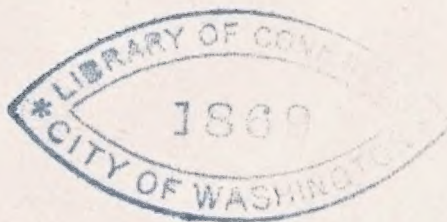
OUT OF THE FIRE.

5460. a

BY

MARY DWINELL CHELLIS,

AUTHOR OF "DEACON SIM'S PRAYERS," "OLD SUNAPEE," "THE
TEMPERANCE DOCTOR," ETC. ETC.



NEW YORK:

National Temperance Society and Publication House,

172 WILLIAM STREET.

1869.

PZ3
C399 Out

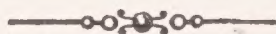
Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1868, by

J. N. STEARNS,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

Rockwell & Rollins, Printers and Stereotypers,
122 Washington Street, Boston.

OUT OF THE FIRE.



I.

“Woman’s grief and woman’s sighs
Going up to Heaven;
God of mercy hear her sighs,
Heal each spirit riven;
By thine all-prevailing might
Break the gloom of sorrow’s night.”

A •CHEERY whistle and a light foot-fall upon the well-trodden snow-path were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the winter evening.

Suddenly even these sounds ceased, and Clement Foster stood by the gate which barred his progress, and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought. Only for a moment, when he sprang to the wall, and, resting one hand on the tall gate-post, gazed around upon

the landscape that lay bathed in moonlight splendor. It was a picture of which one would not soon weary ; but a light, gleaming through the trees, caught the attention of the boy, and he resumed his walk.

"Aunt Rhoda is gone, and no mistake," he said to himself, quickening his pace. Meanwhile an animated conversation was being carried on in Farmer Gray's kitchen.

"It did seem as though Aunt Rhoda never would get started," said the farmer's oldest son.

"I wish father wouldn't keep her always ; but I suppose he will," rejoined Mattie, a bright-eyed girl of twelve years.

"I guess it's mother keeps her more than father," said Elsie. "You know what she told us the other day."

"I likes Aunt Rhody. I don't want her to go off," exclaimed Amos.

"That's because you're so small," replied Elsie. "I used to like her till I got old enough to sweep, and wash dishes."

"I guess we all like her well enough now,

She is rather particular sometimes ; but we are none of us perfect."

"It is all very well to say that ; but it would be pleasant to feel a little more at liberty in our own kitchen. All the neighbors say it's a shame for mother to give up to her as she does."

This was the reply of Mattie to her brother's conciliatory remark, and plainly showed that she had no wish to excuse the faults of Aunt Rhoda.

"I am glad she has gone for two weeks. I shall roast apples and pop corn every evening, and have nobody to scold me," said Elsie. "I wish Clem would come. I'm sure he must see the light, if the moon does shine. There he is !" she exclaimed, after a short pause, during which she had strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the expected guest.

He had just entered and divested himself of coat and cap, when the sound of bells was heard.

"There's Aunt Rhoda back again !" said Judson. "I should know those bells in

Greenland. She must have left her pin-cushion or knitting-sheath."

At this, Mrs. Gray came into the kitchen, welcomed her children's friend, and awaited the arrival of one whose departure had been the cause of so much joy.

"I knew it wasn't right for me to go, and I told Cousin Reuben so, all the time. I saw the moon over my left shoulder, and I knew something would happen," said Aunt Rhoda, as she pushed back the hood that concealed her face.

"What is the trouble?" asked Mrs. Gray.

"Trouble enough," was the reply. "I forgot my knitting-sheath, and you know I can't knit a stitch without it. I hadn't more than got up the hill when I remembered it, and them stockings of mine must be finished."

"Here it is," said Elsie, holding the desired article as high as she could reach.

"Seems to me you're spryer than common; but you needn't put it in my eyes."

At this moment, Aunt Rhoda glanced around the kitchen. There was a basket full

of butter-nuts, with hammer and lapstone beside it. A bunch of corn depended from a hook in the ceiling, and a pan of rosy-cheeked apples occupied a conspicuous position upon the table.

"So this is what you're up to! I guess I'd better stay at home, Miss Gray. Somebody ought to look after these children. There'll be no end of grease-spots on the floor, and the hearth'll be spoilt. Guess I'd better stay. You never'll be able to clean up after such a muss."

"The children are going to clean up," replied Mrs. Gray. We shall get along very well. You must not lose your visit."

"Haint you found your sheath, Rhody?" called Reuben. "It is pretty cold waiting out here."

"I suppose it is cold; but he might come for me before night. I guess I'll look into my room, a minute, and see if everything's right."

Elsie carried the candle, anxious to do all in her power to shorten the visitation. Satis-

fied with the result of the inspection, Aunt Rhoda returned to the kitchen, and, Reuben again expressing his impatience, she was obliged to take her leave.

"Now the coast is really clear," said Judson. "I will crack the nuts, Clem, while you and the girls attend to the corn."

It was no modern kitchen in which these children were assembled. There was the old-fashioned fireplace, which received huge logs of birch and maple, giving forth, in return, a wondrous glow of light and heat. The hearth was of stone, and had been polished by constant rubbing, until it formed a fitting mirror to reflect the flaming, flashing fire.

The brick oven found place in the ample chimney, and in the opposite side was a deep recess, known as the "warm corner." The crane still maintained its position, although its office had become almost a sinecure since the introduction of a stove into the wash-room, where much of the cooking for the family was done.

This kitchen, in which Farmer Gray had

spent a large part of his boyhood, when within doors, was the most cheerful room in the house, and the children felt themselves greatly aggrieved by the somewhat despotic rule of Aunt Rhoda. Neither nuts nor corn could be brought here without her permission ; and, when this was granted, it was accompanied with so many conditions and warnings as to make it of little value.

Not a spot or hull escaped her notice, while she expressed her horror of "dirt and litter" in no measured terms. As for "toasting apples and having them sputter all over the hearth," such a thing could not be tolerated.

There had been many threats of rebellion among the unwilling subjects, and some attempts had been made to throw off the yoke ; but these attempts always ended in discomfiture and submission. Aunt Rhoda's will was not lightly to be set aside, and Mrs. Gray, who had been long an invalid, would concede, much rather than insist upon, her own authority.

The visit to Cousin Reuben's had been long and anxiously expected ; but it had been delayed for various reasons, until the children feared it would never be made. At length, greatly to their relief, the day had been selected. Long before the usual dinner hour, Aunt Rhoda had basket and bundle in readiness, and it was but little past noon when, arrayed in a new print dress, many-hued and brilliant, she seated herself by the window to watch and wait.

She was sitting there when the children returned from school, and, at a word from her sister, Elsie ran after Clement Foster to tell him they must give up their plans for the evening. It was a great disappointment, and, after a moment's consideration, she added, "Perhaps Aunt Rhoda may go yet. You might come over and see."

The boy shook his head decidedly.

"Well, Clem, you come as far as the gate," said Elsie. "If she goes, I'll put a light in the north window, and you can see it from there."

Anticipations were fully realized. There was nothing to mar the pleasure of the merry group. Farmer Gray and his wife left the sitting-room, and occupied the old arm-chairs in the kitchen.

The party was increased by one of the neighbor's coming in with his whole family. This necessitated an additional supply of nuts and corn, while the room echoed with shouts of laughter.

Ample justice was done to the simple entertainment. The older people then discussed the news; the younger told stories, and, when tired of that, traced pictures in the glowing coals.

"How long is Rhoda to be gone?" asked Mrs. Pease.

"Two or three weeks," was the reply. "It will depend somewhat upon my health."

"That is a long time for her to stay away from you. I began to think she had a principle against leaving you, even for a night. I only wonder how you have patience to get along with her."

"I should never have strength to get along without her. She has taken upon herself the hard work of my family, and cared for me in sickness as tenderly as a sister."

"I know all that, but —"

"I understand her peculiarities," interrupted Mrs. Gray. "They are not always pleasant; but her life has not been a pleasant one."

"True," was the reply. "I ought not to forget that, and I am glad any one is willing to give her a home."

"We do not give her a home, Mrs. Pease. Rhoda Smith asks no charity. She earns all that she receives. Money can never repay her for the weary nights she has watched with me and my children."

Here the conversation was interrupted, and, soon after, the visitors took their leave. Then a chapter was read from the old family Bible, and each young head was bowed as the father prayed for the blessing of God to rest upon each and all of them.

It was to a far different home from this that

Aunt Rhoda had gone. Her cousin, Reuben Smith, called himself a farmer, but his few scantily tilled acres were scarcely worthy the name of farm, and he possessed none of the thrift belonging to a successful farmer.

The exterior of the house was far from attractive. The snow concealed many defects, but it only rendered more conspicuous the broken windows, repaired with old hats and cast-off garments. The path leading to the door was narrow and half shovelled, in perfect keeping with everything belonging to the place.

"Shiftless!" muttered the visitor, as she walked up the uneven path.

A woman was standing at the door to welcome her. "Glad to see you, Rhody," she said. "My supper has been waiting a long time."

An impatient reply rose to the lips of Rhoda Smith, as she thought of a whole afternoon spent in waiting; but one glance at the worn, haggard face before her moved her heart to pity.

There had been an effort to give a cosy, homelike look to the room she entered. A cheerful fire was blazing upon the hearth, the floor was scrupulously clean, and the few articles of furniture were arranged to produce the best effect.

By the time the usual inquiries in regard to health had been made and answered, Reuben came in from the barn. His wife looked at him anxiously for a moment, and then turned away with a sigh.

Not often was such a supper seen in that house. A visit from Cousin Rhoda was a rare event, and extra preparations had been made.

"You are not looking well, Samantha," said the guest, as she seated herself at the table. "I guess you need somebody to help you and cheer you up."

"I dont need any help," was the reply; "there aint much to do since Susan died; but I get low-spirited staying alone. Reuben aint at home much."

Reuben cleared his throat and seemed about to speak when this was said; then, evidently

changed his mind, and turned again to his supper.

Rhoda then addressed him, inquiring how much stock he was keeping.

"Not much," he replied. "My hay didn't turn out very well, and I never have any luck giving my cattle coarse fodder."

"That's because you don't cure it well; your corn was left standing too long. But you had a nice-looking piece of potatoes; they ought to help out your hay."

The speaker knew perfectly well about the potatoes. They had not been taken from the ground until many of them were frozen. Her only object in mentioning them was to oblige her cousin to make a humiliating confession, which she hoped he would remember.

"I had a sick spell last fall, and was late getting them in; so they didn't turn out so well as I expected."

This was said in a deprecating tone, as though claiming sympathy; but none was offered. Nothing connected with his business ever did turn out so well as he expected;

yet others were never disappointed in the result. Idleness and neglect received their due reward.

After supper the indispensable knitting-sheath was produced, and Rhoda's fingers kept time with her tongue. At first the host joined feebly in the conversation, but, discomfited by two or three sharp remarks, calculated to lessen his self-esteem, he took refuge in silence.

The time had been when Samantha Bean looked down upon Rhoda Smith, and thought herself much the more fortunate of the two. That time had gone by, and she was now disposed to envy her who, with strong heart and willing hands, provided for her own wants.

The man whom her girlish fancy had invested with all desirable qualities was far from being a generous, considerate husband. Her children had died young, leaving her sorrowing and well-nigh heart-broken. As she said, there seemed little to do since Susan's death.

When the last of those who had called her

"mother" passed away, the light went out from that lowly dwelling, leaving only darkness. The first winter's snow now rested upon the grave of the child; so that time had not blunted the keenness of sorrow for her loss.

The circumstances connected with her death had been peculiarly aggravating. An illness, which at first appeared slight, suddenly assumed a more serious aspect, and the father left home to summon a physician. Unfortunately he was obliged to pass the village tavern. Here several of his companions were spending an idle hour, and he was invited to "stop and take a drink." The temptation was too strong for his weak powers of resistance, and considerable time was spent in the bar-room.

In consequence of this delay, he reached the house of Dr. Webb just after this worthy man had started to visit a patient, several miles distant.

"It's just like my luck not to find the doctor at home; but I left word for him

to come over the first thing to-morrow morning," said Reuben Smith to his anxious wife, when he returned home.

"Did you go right there?" she asked.

"I only stopped a minute at Lang's," was the reply.

"That's the trouble. If you'd keep away from Lang's, you'd have better luck."

"There 'tis, Samantha. That's just the way. I wish you wan't all the time finding fault. I guess 'twont make no difference whether the doctor comes to night or in the morning."

With this cold comfort the mother was forced to solace herself, and, watching anxiously by the bedside of her suffering child, the night wore away.

Morning came, and with it Dr. Webb. "The disease is far advanced," he said, shaking his head ominously. "You should have sent for me before. If your husband had reached my house ten minutes earlier, I could have come here yesterday."

Mrs. Smith knew enough of her husband

to feel sure that he had spent more than ten minutes in "Lang's bar-room." Whatever might have been done the previous evening, human skill now availed nothing, and the mother felt that the life of her child was sacrificed.

She talked of this to her visitor, who listened patiently, although unable to offer any consolation.

"It all comes of liquor," said the poor wife. "If he'd only let that alone, things would go well enough. Folks called him smart once; but he's always behindhand now. There's the barn, not fit for a horse or cow. I wonder it don't come rattling down in some of the high winds."

The knitting-needles were plied more vigorously, and the lips closed more tightly, as this was said. "Reuben was smart," at length replied his cousin; "but he was always fond of his glass. He and Dexter Rollins were great cronies, and to my mind they were pretty much alike."

Mrs. Smith answered this last remark with

more spirit than she could have been supposed to possess. Beneath all the disappointment and sorrow of her married life lay a memory of the happy days preceding.

The man whose character was thus discussed slept heavily until about nine o'clock, when he roused himself with an audible yawn, and, lighting a lantern, went "to look after the cattle."

There was no reading of the Scriptures; no prayer for forgiveness and protection. The day closed with no acknowledgment of God's power or goodness.

The next morning it was found that some wood must be prepared for the fire, and, after considerable delay, Reuben Smith set about the work.

There is music in the sharp ringing of an axe as the blows fall quickly and firmly, but the dull, uncertain sounds, heard only at intervals, telling, as they do, of undecided purpose and faltering hands, contain no element of music.

"Dear me, what chopping!" thought the

visitor. "I could do better than that myself. If t'would do any good, I'd go out and give Reuben a piece of my mind."

She went to the windows to look at the "lazy chopper," who held his axe uplifted for a blow, when a half-clad child was seen running towards the house.

"Come here, Samantha, and tell me whose child this is," said Rhoda. "She seems to be in a great hurry."

"It's Deacon Rollins' girl. There must be something wrong, or she never'd run like that. There she is down, half buried in the snow. She has a hard time to get along."

But the child sprang to her feet and hastened on, the two women meeting her at the door. "What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"Mother's cut her foot with an axe, and wants you to come over," replied the girl, in a husky voice, as she fell to the floor. Almost breathless from the great exertion she had made, chilled by exposure to the cold, and faint for want of food, it was some time

before she was able to answer any further questions.

Rhoda, quick to see what should be done, took the child in her arms, saying, as she did so, "Tell Reuben to harness the horse. You must ride if you're going over there."

Her cousin coming into the house at that moment, she delivered the message herself, charging him to "be spry about it. The woman may bleed to death before anybody gets there," she said. "And you, Samantha, had better put on your cloak and hood so as to be all ready."

"You'd better go yourself," was the reply. "I shan't know nothing what to do when I get there."

"Not know what to do, as old as you are? I don't want to go into that house, and I guess Dexter Rollins won't want to see me; but I'm sorry for his wife, and I can go with you if it's necessary. We'd better take a roll of old cloth. It may be needed, and they say there aint much of anything in the house there ought to be."

Mrs. Smith shook her head in disapproval of this remark, as she observed a deep blush overspread the face of the child. "How came your mother to be using an axe?" she asked.

"She was cutting some wood," was the somewhat hesitating reply. "Father hadn't got up and there wasn't any fire."

"Thank my stars I had some sense when I was a girl, and I guess there's some left!" exclaimed Rhoda Smith.

"All ready," shouted a voice from the yard.

"We are all ready too," answered Samanthy.

"You going, Rhoda?" asked the man.

"Yes. They'll want somebody that knows what to do, and I've seen a good many bad cuts in my life. You can stay and chop some wood against we come back."

Thus summarily dismissed, Reuben Smith went into the house, while the women did their own loading up."

Lizzie Rollins was closely wrapped in a

large woollen shawl, while Rhoda took the reins, and urged the horse to the top of his speed.

"I guess we shan't find very good sleighing after we turn off from the road," said her companion. "I don't believe there's been a team through since the last snow."

"That comes from green wood," said the driver, unheeding the remark, and glancing from the almost trackless snow to the heavy black smoke issuing from the chimney of the house to which they were going. "A man must be shiftless to be without dry wood such weather as this."

There was no need of ceremony in making this visit. Help had come not a moment too soon. Three ragged children stood crying around the mother, who, with fast-failing strength, was vainly endeavoring to stanch the blood that flowed from her wound. The husband, looking more like a brute than a man, held a pair of wheezy bellows in his hand, with which he commenced blowing the fire, so soon as the door opened.

Not deigning to notice him, Rhoda Smith threw back her hood and examined the injured foot. "A bad cut," she said. "You'll need the doctor to take care of this, but I can stop the bleeding."

This was quickly done. "Now I'm going after the doctor," she said. "Samanthy, you can tidy up the room, while I'm gone, and make Miss Rollins a cup of tea."

"There aint any tea in the house," whispered Lizzie. "Mother was going to make gruel for breakfast."

"Haint you had breakfast yet?" asked Rhoda.

"No, ma'am, only some little pieces of bread," replied the child. "I guess mother's hungry, for she didn't have any, and she didn't eat any supper last night."

Rhoda stayed to hear no more, and, as she went out, the father muttered something about children's keeping still when there was "company round."

Mrs. Smith hardly knew where to commence. Nothing but a thorough scrubbing

with soap and sand would ever make that floor tolerable, and for this she had neither time nor inclination. A broom made of hemlock boughs was standing in one corner, and with this she managed to remove some of the loose dirt. The hearth was brushed, and the children's faces washed.

She was considering what could next be done, when Dr. Webb drove up. He had started for his round of visits when he met Rhoda, and, learning her errand, made all possible haste. He had been in the old house before, and therefore was not surprised at the want of cleanliness and comfort.

"I hope it aint anything serious," said Mrs. Rollins, as the bandage was removed and the wounded foot exposed.

"It will be some time before you can use your foot much. You'll be obliged to keep pretty still for a while."

"I don't see how I can, doctor. There won't be anybody to take care of my children," said the poor woman, the hot tears coursing down her cheeks.

"Your husband must look after them," was the reply. "In the first place, you need a better fire than this. Bring some chips, Lizzie, and let us see if we can't have a blaze."

Both wood and chips were green, but the doctor was persevering, and a blaze soon rewarded his efforts. Faint and fitful at first, it gradually grew stronger until it threw a warm glow over the room.

This accomplished, he went out to talk with the husband, who had made his escape from the house, and was leaning against a rough shanty that served as shelter for a half-fed cow. He was scowling angrily while giving utterance to his displeasure in half-whispered curses. "Woman hurt, and children crying. What's a fellow to do now?" he at length said aloud.

"I can tell you what to do," replied a clear, manly voice. "Go to work and take care of your family. Keep away from Lang's and let liquor alone. It's of no use to look cross at me," continued the doctor.

"Your wife is badly hurt, and won't get over it very soon."

There was no response from the man thus addressed. He only passed a hand through his matted hair, giving it a vigorous pull, while he changed the position of his feet.

"Have your children had any breakfast?" asked his companion.

"The woman sees to that," was the sullen reply.

"She can't cook a breakfast unless there is something to cook; and, to tell you the truth, Rollins, your children look hungry. Do you know anything about it?"

"No," growled the father, again pulling his hair, and taking a few steps forward.

"I can't afford to spend any more time here with you," said the doctor, after a short pause, during which he looked at the man before him with an expression of disgust upon his own fine face. "You had better go into the house and do the best you can to make your family comfortable. Felton will give you work whenever you are ready to keep

sober. But here comes Rhoda Smith back again."

"O old maid!" growled Dexter Rollins. "Nobody wants her round here; I wish she'd stay away and mind her own business."

"No danger of her troubling you long," was the reply. "I think she never intruded her company upon you."

A severe hit, keenly felt; but Dr. Webb did not stop to see its effect. The words were hardly spoken when he was engaged in talking with Rhoda Smith. "Are you going in?" he asked.

"Not if I can help it. I guess I'm not wanted here, but I stopped on the way to get some tea and crackers for Miss Rollins. She looks to me as though she needed something to eat."

"Will Mrs. Smith stay?" he asked.

"I can't speak for her. She might as well, if she can do any good," replied Rhoda.

"There is need of somebody," said the doctor.

"Need of a good provider."

"No doubt of that, Rhoda; I wish Rollins had a wife who could make him work and bring his wages home."

"A man who can't do his duty without being made to do it, isn't fit to have a wife. That's my way of thinking, and always was."

By this time Mrs. Smith came out and inquired of Rhoda what was best to do. "I really believe they are all half starved," she said, "and there's nothing but corn-meal in the house."

"Folks won't starve if they have enough of that and know how to cook it," was the reply. "Mercy Rowe was called a handsome girl; but she never was much of a hand for business, and since she married Dexter Rollins she's had enough to discourage any woman. Folks call me an old maid; but I'd be forty old maids before I'd have such a shiftless drinking man for a husband. I've seen enough of it."

The doctor laughingly applauded her good sense. He had known her for many years,

and understood what a good, true heart she concealed under a somewhat rough exterior. It needed but a few words to induce her to enter the miserable home, and, with her own hands, prepare the morning meal.

It was very simple, consisting only of "hasty-pudding" and skimmed milk; the milk having been sent in by a kind neighbor. But there was plenty, served in bowls and cups that were perfectly clean, and, with hunger for sauce, the children made an excellent breakfast. The mother, refreshed with the tea, tried to look hopeful, despite the assurance that she must not "expect to get about at present."

Lizzie was sent to call her father; but the summons was unheeded. He had received some parting advice from the doctor, and was earnestly considering it. Discharged from the shop in which he had worked during the summer, he had, early in the autumn, removed his family to the old house they now occupied. He hurled imprecations against his employer, stigmatizing him as a

tyrant, while he boasted of his own ability and independence ; yet he knew that he only was in fault.

Mr. Felton had borne with his irregularity and drunkenness until it was impossible for him longer to endure it. He had then told the unfortunate man that he must look elsewhere for work.

Strong and healthy, there was no reason why Dexter Rollins should not obtain remunerative labor ; but he had spent most of the winter in idleness. Occasionally working for a day or two, he thus obtained the means to gratify his appetite, while he provided for his family only enough to keep them from starvation.

He had reached a point where something must be done. His last half dollar had been spent in a drunken carousal the evening before. The prospect was dark. He was cold and hungry, yet nothing would tempt him to enter the house while Rhoda Smith was there. Ashamed to go to the neighbor's, he shivered and fretted in a most uncomfortable frame of mind as well as body.

When nearly an hour had elapsed he was rejoiced to see Reuben Smith's horse driven from the door, and, assuring himself that the sleigh was occupied by the woman whom he so dreaded to meet, he breathed more freely. "I aint afraid of Samanthy," he said to himself. "Reuben likes a glass as well as I do."

He went in, making some pretence of sympathy for his wife, and taking care to secure a full share of pudding and milk.

Who could believe that this man had ever been considered handsome and smart! His eyes were blood-shotten, the lids swollen, while thick, purple lips but half concealed a revolting mouth. Hair and beard, once black, now grizzled and shaggy, added to the repulsiveness of his face.

When he was married to Mercy Rowe they were called a handsome couple, but she had changed nearly as much as he. The bloom and plumpness of her cheeks had given place to sallow emaciation, while the golden hair, which had been her pride in the days of girl-

hood, had faded and fallen until all that remained was carelessly confined with a broken side-comb. Her form had grown thin and angular, the want of sympathy and fulness made more apparent by her slatternly dress.

Sitting there in the midst of dirt and confusion, she did not present an attractive picture ; but the suffering and privation she had endured gave her a claim upon the sympathy of those who had been more fortunate.

Not knowing how or where the next meal was to be obtained, she yet retained too much pride to utter any complaint, and made an effort to appear cheerful, while Mrs. Smith performed various acts of neighborly kindness. She had volunteered to remain in this comfortless abode through the day. It seemed unkind to leave Mrs. Rollins, but she was quite at a loss to know how to occupy her time. As she afterwards said to Rhoda, "There was everything to do, and nothing to do with."

After satisfying his appetite, the miserable husband seated himself by the fire, and com-

menced smoking, saying, as he did so, "I believe you don't object to smoking, Samantha."

She did not object to it; that would have been useless; but it was by no means agreeable to her. Her husband smoked, and she endured the infliction as she did that of his drinking rum and whiskey.

She noticed that the man before her had a good supply of tobacco, enough to fill pipe and mouth for several days to come.

While he remained in the house the children kept close to their mother, seeming afraid to speak above a whisper. About noon he got up, shook the ashes from his pipe, and, buttoning his ragged coat, started off.

The children were relieved, but his wife looked after him anxiously. There was neither food nor fuel for the day. The last of the corn-meal had been eaten that morning. There were only a few crackers.

Thinking of all this, helpless as she was, her composure gave way. "What shall I do?" she cried; "there is nothing left for us but to die."

Her neighbor, wishing to encourage her,

bade her hope for better days ; but she knew by her own bitter experience that there was little ground for hope.

"I have nothing to offer you for dinner," said the unhappy woman.

"No matter for that," was the reply. "I shall do very well without. Don't think of me."

The children were not so easily satisfied. They clamored for "something to eat," and the crackers were divided among them. Their mother drank a cup of tea, and protested that she had no need of food.

"Where has father gone?" at length asked Lizzie.

I can better answer that question than she to whom it was addressed. When he reached the main road, he stopped, quite undecided what direction to go. Had there been a stray ninepence in his pocket, he would probably have found his way to the village. He felt the cravings of a drunkard's thirst, but he had neither money nor credit.

The shop in which he had worked was two

miles distant, yet that was no place for him. He'd go down to Reuben's if it wasn't for the visitor. He would rather freeze than encounter her.

A feeling of chilliness warned him that he must not stop where he was. He walked on past the house of Reuben Smith, and made a call upon the next neighbor. This man and his wife had been his companions when they were young, and he then thought himself their equal. But everything had changed since then. They had sufficient of this world's goods, while he was poor and destitute. Their home was one of happiness, while wretchedness brooded over his dwelling. He never thought of them without cursing his own bad luck, and often cursed them for being more prosperous than himself. Yet they always treated him kindly. This morning he was invited to a seat by the fire, inquiries were made in regard to his family, and a sincere sympathy expressed for his wife, of whose misfortune they had not before heard.

Mrs. Balch went to the sitting-room to repeat the news to her mother, a dear old lady whose heart overflowed with kindness to every living thing. As she listened, she threw up her hands, saying, as she did so, "Poor thing! I wonder if there's anything in the house to eat. We must see to that, Mary. I guess I'll go out and speak to Dexter."

"Good-morning," she said, pleasantly, as she opened the door. "Mary says your wife has cut her foot. How did it happen?"

The man hesitated before replying. "She was cutting some wood," he said, at length.

"Cutting wood!" repeated Grandmother Balch. "So she was doing your work. That was all wrong. She has enough to do that really belongs to her."

By this time the old lady and Dexter Rollins were the only inmates of the room, and she felt at liberty to speak plainly. "I'm afraid you're not doing your duty to your family. I remember you as you were twenty years ago."

"I didn't look much as I do now," said the man, at last aroused from his silence. "I wish I was back there again."

"And do you wish to live over the last twenty years of your life?"

"I should like to feel as well as I did then."

"I can tell you how you may do that. You are a young man yet, only forty-two years old, right in the prime of life. If things have gone wrong with you, it is your own fault."

At this the man half rose from his chair, while an angry flush spread over his swarthy face.

"Don't be angry with me, Dexter," said a kind voice. "I was your mother's friend, and, for her sake, you must bear with an old woman."

A withered hand rested lightly upon his shoulder as this was said, and, turning to look at this friend, he saw that tears were trembling in her eyes. "I wish I was a better man," he murmured; "but it's no use. Everything is against me."

"You are mistaken there, Dexter Rollins. Everything is in your favor. You have health, strength, and a good trade. What provision have you made for your family to-day? Have they all they need to make them comfortable?"

The flush deepened. Then, as if suddenly realizing a terrible truth, his cheek paled. "There is nothing in the house to eat," he whispered, hoarsely.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," was the hopeless reply. "I haven't a cent of money, and I couldn't get trusted if I should try."

"If you'd let drinking alone you'd have both money and credit. Mr. Felton needs your help, and will be glad to take you back if you'll keep sober."

"That wouldn't help me now. He never pays in advance."

"I will pay in advance," said Grandmother Balch. "Promise me that nothing stronger than tea or coffee shall pass your lips for one month, and I will see that your family is

supplied with food. Think of it well," she added, after a short pause. "It is your only hope. What would you say if your mother stood in my place? She prayed that you might be a good man."

This was sufficient. He gave the desired promise without further hesitation.

"Now I will fulfil my part of the bargain," said the happy old lady.

A basket of food was soon in readiness, and, with some kind words at parting, Dexter Rollins was sent home to his family. The distance was quickly passed, and, to the surprise of his wife, he entered the house, bringing what was so greatly needed.

The smouldering fire reminded him of another duty. A few sticks of green wood were piled just outside the door; but a short distance from the house was a large wood-lot, and the owner of this had told him that he would be welcome to any of the dry branches that lay scattered upon the ground.

For the first time, he thought of taking advantage of this privilege. He had not even

a wheelbarrow to aid him in his work ; but he had plenty of strength and a determined will. Taking a piece of rope, that hung dangling from a nail, he started for the woods.

The children watched him from the window, wondering ; and they wondered still more when they saw him return, bending under the load which he carried.

It was an easy task to prepare this for the fire, and some was soon blazing and crackling upon the hearth. The basket had been emptied, and Mrs. Smith was preparing supper when her husband drove up.

"Just step this way," he said to Dexter Rollins as he opened the door. "I've just come from the village, and I've got something here that'll give you a lift such a day as this. Take a drink, but don't let the women see you. They make a dreadful fuss about a drop of gin or whiskey."

"Not any for me," was the reply, as the proffered flask was pushed aside.

"Why, Dec, what ails you?" asked the astonished man.

"I just promised Aunt Lizzie Balch I wouldn't drink anything stronger than tea or coffee for the next month, and I'm going to keep my promise."

"Guess you'll find it a tough job."

"Can't help it. It's got to be done. I wouldn't tell Aunt Lizzie a lie for all the whiskey in town."

"Aunt Lizzie is a good woman," said Reuben Smith, not knowing what other reply to make. "I guess, if you'll speak to my wife, I'll turn the horse round, and we'll be going towards home as soon as she's ready."

Mrs. Smith anticipated the summons and there was no necessity for waiting. Little was said during the ride; but when they reached home, Rhoda had many questions to ask.

In replying, the basket of food and the dry wood were not forgotten. "They won't suffer from cold or hunger to-night," said their neighbor. "Dec was sober when I came away."

"I presume he is drunk by this time."

Mistaken conclusion ! He was hard at work replenishing his wood-pile, and when it grew too dark to enter the forest, he plied the axe vigorously.

Even Rhoda Smith would have been fully satisfied with the rapid strokes. She had that day made an effort to rouse her cousin from his listlessness. "Your house will tumble down about your ears, unless it is repaired," she said. "Either you or I must fasten some clapboards before I try to sleep here another night."

By this and similar appeals, she succeeded in making her host very uncomfortable ; but it was doubtful if they would have any permanent effect. When charged with the decreasing value of his land, he attributed it to bad luck. His doctor's bills were large, and his taxes high. Take it all together, he didn't seem to get along very well.

"Where's that bay colt you had a year ago ?" asked Rhoda, abruptly.

"I let Lang have him," was the reply.

"You ought to have got a good price for it.

I heard Mr. Gray say there wasn't a better colt in town. How much did you get for it?"

"Lang had a bill against me, and there wasn't much my due when we settled," he replied, with some confusion.

"So the price of that colt went down your throat, Reuben Smith. I knew it all, before. That's the way you got rid of your meadow land and that piece of timber."

It was useless to deny the imputation. "Well, it's gone and there's no use worrying about it," said the man, after a prolonged silence. "It can't be helped now."

"I know it's gone," was the reply, "and it won't take long for the rest to follow after. What are you going to do then?"

No one, except Rhoda Smith, would have presumed to ask this man so many direct questions; but they had been brought up together, and she felt at liberty to say to him what she pleased.

The last question was one which had often suggested itself, and should have been fairly

met; but, temporizing as he was, he set it aside, glad that he could make a reasonable excuse for leaving the house. He was going for his wife, and, feeling low-spirited, went first to the village, and there added another charge to Lang's account.

II.

“Beggared and orphaned, the demon of drink,

With merciless fingers, untiring and strong,

Slowly, but surely, had forged every link

Which bound its poor victims to sin and to wrong;

While wives mourned in secret, their hearts crushed with grief,

Till death came, in mercy, to give them relief.”

“DEAR me ! Just look at all those dishes, Judson. Every one of them must be washed, wiped, and put back in place. Mother said we might have pancakes for supper, if I would do all the work. I’ve seen Aunt Rhoda make them a hundred times, and I thought it was real easy ; but I was mistaken. I’ve worked hard for more than an hour, and it will take ever so much longer to clean up. Then, I presume, the pancakes won’t be worth eating.”

By the time Mattie Gray had finished this long speech, her brother was laughing heartily at the rueful face before him. Aunt Rhoda

had been gone less than a week ; but the girls had found that popping corn and toasting apples were only a small part of the work necessary for the comfort of the family.

Mrs. Gray missed Rhoda's efficient help, and, as she looked forward to the labors of a day, they seemed nearly as formidable to her as did the array of dishes to her daughter.

The supper, of which pancakes formed the principal dish, was upon the table at the usual time, and, whatever may have been the misgivings of the youthful cook, they were speedily dissipated.

"Aunt Rhoda's mantle must have fallen upon you, Mattie. She couldn't do better than this," said Mr. Gray.

This praise was some compensation for the hard work she had done ; but she was too tired to care much for her supper.

Elsie tried to keep up good courage, and persevered in toasting apples until she concluded that "cleaning up spoiled all the fun." Dish-washing and sweeping were bur-

densome as ever, and she was quite ready to welcome Aunt Rhoda back again.

After the supper-table was cleared, the last dish washed, and the fire replenished, the children asked their father to tell them a story.

"What kind of a story shall it be?" he asked, smiling pleasantly upon the group around him.

"I want to hear a bear story," said Amos, who had a great fancy for the growls which always accompanied such a story.

"You can wait till some other time for that," said Elsie. "We want to hear something else."

"Then suppose I tell you the story of an orphan girl. I used to pity her very much because she had no father nor mother; and, perhaps, you will pity her, too, when you have heard about her."

The girls professed themselves anxious to hear the story, and Mr. Gray proceeded:—

"Seventy-five years ago, a man by the name

of Dalton lived on Cross Mountain, near the old well."

As this was said, Judson laid down his slate and closed his arithmetic. He had a great curiosity in regard to the people who formerly lived on this mountain, and his father had often promised to tell him their history.

"The first settlers here put up some kind of a cabin before bringing their families; but this man came in the spring, with a young wife. Of course they were obliged to camp out, and the woman seemed to enjoy it quite as well as her husband. After their house was built she spent a great deal of time in the woods. She knew how to use a rifle, and had better luck in fishing than any man about here. People said she had some gypsy blood in her veins; but no one knew anything about it.

"Before winter set in, the man went away for a few days, and, when he returned, he brought some boxes filled with furniture, books, and clothing. Then the house was

put in order, and the neighbors began to talk about the money it must take to buy all these things."

"I shouldn't think anybody would want nice things in a log house," said Mattie.

"Log houses can be made very comfortable," replied her father. "Nice things are not so out of place in them as you might think. This log house stood but a short distance from the well, and I have heard my grandmother say that the great ash-tree which shades it was set there by Mrs. Dalton.

"They lived in the log house five years, and then a framed house was built where the cellar now is. When they moved to their new home they had a house-warming, and everybody in town was invited."

"They must have had a large house," interrupted Mattie.

"The house was large, but the town was not very thickly settled then. At any rate, the guests were well accommodated and handsomely entertained, and came away well pleased with everything."

"Were you there, father?" asked Amos, innocently.

"Of course he wasn't," said Elsie, not waiting for her father to reply. "That was seventy years ago, and father is only forty years old."

"Then how does he know all about it?"

"My grandmother told me," said Mr. Gray.

"Was she there?"

"Indeed she was, and enjoyed it wonderfully. It was a grand affair for those times. The people went early in the afternoon, and some of them stayed most of the night. There was a good deal of hard drinking, and those who were the last to leave made pretty slow work of getting home."

"I hope they didn't go both sides of the road, as Dec Rollins sometimes does," said Judson.

"I can't tell about that; but Dec Rollins' grandfather was there, and he could find as many sides to the road as anybody.

"These people had five children, — three

sons and two daughters. They all had black hair and eyes, like their mother, and were considered very smart. But, when they grew older, the boys didn't like working on a farm, so they persuaded their father to lease his place and move to a larger town. People didn't travel much in those days, and writing letters wasn't greatly in fashion; so the old neighbors didn't hear much about the Daltons for several years.

"The man who hired the farm sent the money for the rent regularly, and received a receipt in return; further than that, he went on the same as if everything belonged to him. It was a valuable piece of land, and he made money on it.

"At last news came that Mr. Dalton and his wife were both dead, and one of the daughters had come into possession of the property here. The tenant had talked before of buying the place, and now tried to do so; but the owner refused to sell.

"Two or three summers after, the daughter and her husband came on, looked around for

a few days, and then went away. The next year the rent was raised, and the tenant grumbled loudly; but then it was much less than he could afford to pay.

"Four years from the time of the visit he received word that the owners proposed to occupy the farm themselves. Some said the man had been unfortunate in business, and they were obliged to come here.

"There was a good deal of curiosity about them, but they didn't mix much with the people. Another family, consisting of a man and his wife, with two children, came with them. The men were cousins, and the two families lived together the first year. Then they separated, and the stranger bought a farm about two miles from the old home-stead."

"You haven't said anything about an orphan girl, father," interrupted Elsie, who was getting impatient for her part of the story.

"I am coming to her," was the reply. "She was a grand-daughter of Mr. Dalton, and lived on Cross Mountain."

"Was she pretty?" asked Mattie. "Did she have blue eyes and curly hair?"

"Her father and mother thought she was very pretty. Perhaps you wouldn't think so. She had black eyes and straight hair; but she was a great comfort to her mother, who never seemed very happy after she came back here. Her husband wasn't much of a farmer, and he didn't like hard work very well. He tried a good many experiments, and under his management the farm began to run down.

When he first came back the man who had lived on the place seemed angry because he was obliged to leave, and avoided all intercourse with the owner. But after two or three years he changed his course, and lost no opportunity to gain his favor. They spent considerable time together, and those who had a chance to know said there was a good deal of liquor drank between them. Any way, things went from bad to worse on the mountain, and, as the proprietor there grew poorer, his companion grew richer.

"My grandmother used to visit his wife,

and once, when she found her crying, she ventured to ask the cause. 'My husband is ruining himself and beggaring me,' she replied. 'This farm was the last of my property, and it will soon be gone.'

"Grandmother tried to comfort her, and before she came away the woman seemed quite encouraged. After that the man seemed to feel that he must do differently. He began to farm in good earnest, and spent his leisure time with his wife and child."

"What was the man's name, father?" asked one of the listeners.

"I guess we will call him Smith. That is a very common name about here."

"What was the man's name who lived there before he came?"

"I am not quite ready to tell you that. I must go on with my story, or it will be late before I get through. Amos has gone to sleep already, and perhaps the rest of you have heard enough."

"Oh, no, father, please don't stop; we have not heard enough!" exclaimed both of the

girls, while Judson's looks expressed anything but weariness.

"Where was I when you interrupted me?"

"Mr. Smith had just begun to work."

"Oh, yes; and he worked well; paid off some of his debts, and bought more stock for his farm.

"The tenant found after a while that he wasn't making money quite fast enough to suit him, so he put out a sign and opened a bar-room, where men could buy and drink liquor as long as they had money or credit. It was a great place of resort, and most of the trades among the farmers were made there. Mr. Smith kept away for some time, but the landlord managed to get him in, one day when he was riding by, and after that he was a good customer. It wasn't long before all his evenings were spent there, and some days he was there from morning until night. Of course his farm was neglected, and everything went wrong. All his wife could say had no effect, and he became a perfect sot."

"That means a drunkard, don't it?" asked Elsie.

"Yes, a drunkard of the worst kind; and Mr. Smith was that. He was hardly ever sober. One night, when he had been out late, his house and barn were burnt to the ground, and people thought the fire was set by his own carelessness. He was too much intoxicated to know anything about it, and his wife had hard work to get him out of the house. They were some distance from neighbors, so that, by the time any one could get there, it was too late to save much.

"The cousin offered them a temporary home, and the people of the town were making preparations to assist them in building a new house when Mr. Smith died very suddenly, after a short sickness.

"When an examination was made of his affairs, the rumrunner brought in notes and bills against the estate, covering all that remained after the other debts were paid. There was some talk about dishonesty, but the papers were allowed.

"This left the widow destitute. There was a purse made up for her, and it was known that she received money from her brothers; but she was completely broken down in health and spirits. She lived only six months after her husband died, and then there was an orphan girl who cried day and night because she was left alone.

"Word was sent to her uncles; but they made no provision for her, so she remained where she was. There were no girls in the family, and she soon made herself so useful that she could not well be spared. They might not intend to treat her unkindly, but she was a perfect drudge; and there was no end to the steps she took for the boys, who were constantly calling upon her. She never had any time to play; but she didn't complain. She worked from morning till night, just as she was told, without seeming to have any particular interest in what she did.

"Her mother had always cared for her tenderly, and kept her better dressed than other children of her age. Now, she had a shelter

with enough to eat. As for clothes they were given grudgingly, and only what was absolutely necessary. She went to school but a few weeks in the year—”

“Did you go to school with her, father?” asked Mattie.

“Yes, and I remember just how she looked. She was always late, because there was so much work to be done before she was allowed to come.”

“Please tell us how she looked,” said Elsie.

“She was small of her age, her skin was very dark, and her eyes always looked as though she was just ready to cry. The scholars called her homely; but I guess her dresses had something to do with her looks. They were made up in the easiest way, and the cloth was always some dull, faded-out color. I think very likely you would laugh if you should see a little girl dressed as she was then.”

“I don’t think I should laugh at a little girl who hadn’t any father or mother,” said Mat-

tie. "Perhaps she didn't like the dull, homely dresses any better than we should."

"I don't think she did," replied Mr. Gray. "She liked bright colors, and in summer she used to put red flowers in her hair. The boys where she lived laughed at her when they saw them, and told her she looked like an Indian. Then she would go away by herself and have a good cry; but that didn't make things any better. As she grew older she was expected to do most of the hard work for the family. Everybody knew she was unhappy, and there was a good deal said about it; but nobody liked to interfere.

"One afternoon, when she was about sixteen years old, she came down here, looking as though she had just taken her hands out of the dish-water. She said she wanted to see grandmother, and they were shut up together for two or three hours. We youngsters were very curious to know what was going on; but grandmother kept her own counsel. A few weeks afterwards mother told us all about it.

"The girl was getting dissatisfied with her way of living. She had been told that she was a pauper, and twitted of her dependence, until she was determined to know the truth. She was nine years old when her parents died; so she knew something of her father's habits and her mother's unhappiness. She asked grandmother a great many questions about them. Then she wanted to know how much she owed the people where she lived for taking care of her."

"I guess she didn't owe them anything," said Elsie.

"No, indeed. She understood that before she left grandmother, and she understood, too, that she had friends who would assist her in obtaining her rights. After she went home, she had a long talk with her cousins, and I guess there were some high words; but she knew what belonged to her, and the family were obliged to give up. She had never been bound to them, and they had no authority over her. She was able to do more than earn her own living, and she told them if she

stayed with them, they must pay her wages. They refused at first, but she was determined, and the work couldn't be done without her help. So they made a bargain with her, and she felt independent. Now, what do you think she did with the first money she earned?"

Elsie guessed that she bought a pretty dress. Mattie agreed with her. Judson thought she might have spent it for books, but neither of them were right.

"She laid it by to pay her funeral expenses," said Mr. Gray. "She told grandmother she didn't mean to be buried like a pauper, if she had lived like one. After that, she bought red merino for a dress and had it made up like other girls of her age."

"Seems to me you must have been greatly interested in that dress, father," said Judson, laughing. "It made a strong impression upon your mind, to be remembered so long."

"I *was* interested in it, and so was every member of our family. It was cut by my mother, and my sisters helped make it.

Grandmother found some muslin to make a ruffle for the neck, and then Rhoda Smith had a dress pretty enough to wear anywhere."

"Why, father, have you been telling us about Aunt Rhoda?" exclaimed Mattie. "I never thought of her."

"I suspected, some time ago, that you were telling us Aunt Rhoda's story," said Judson. "I heard her talking with mother, once, about her Grandmother Dalton. I wonder if she was always just as particular as she is now."

"She was always neat. No matter how poor and old her clothes were, they were clean."

"I shouldn't think she'd go to see her cousins now. They were so wicked to her, she can't love them," said Elsie.

"She doesn't go very often, and I guess this visit is made from pity," said Mr. Gray.

"Now I wonder who the wicked man was who got all her father's money."

Elsie's curiosity in this respect was not gratified, but Judson knew that he was Clement Foster's grandfather.

As the story was concluded, Mrs. Gray came in from the sitting-room, where she had been resting during the evening. "Why didn't you tell us about Aunt Rhoda before?" asked Mattie, turning to her mother. "I pity her so much, I shall never feel out of patience with her again. It must be a dreadful thing not to have any home, and I hope you'll keep her always."

Then, not waiting for an answer to her question, or a comment upon her remarks, she exclaimed, "I wonder why Aunt Rhoda never got married."

"Perhaps nobody ever asked her," said Elsie.

"That is not the reason," said Mr. Gray. "All the young men were in the habit of drinking more or less, and she had suffered too much to run any risk. She said she could take care of herself, but she couldn't support a drunken husband."

"Did you ever drink rum, father?" asked Elsie, her eyes dilating with astonishment.

"I must plead guilty," was the serious reply. "Yet I was a very moderate drinker, and should have been an exception to the rule if I had abstained entirely."

"How came you to leave off?" asked Judson.

"Your mother thought it was best," replied Mr. Gray, glancing affectionately at his wife.

"And your father agreed with me," she added. "We didn't wish our children to grow up drunkards, and I presume Aunt Rhoda had some influence. She came here the summer after you were born, Judson, and that was the first season your father refused to furnish rum to his workmen. It was a very unpopular decision, and the men left without ceremony. The grass must be cut, and there was need of help; but the idea of a man working all day in the hay-field without some kind of liquor was enough to prevent any one coming here."

At this moment Amos claimed his mother's attention, and she left her husband to complete the history which she had commenced.

"I hope you didn't give up to the men, father," said Mattie.

"I certainly did not. I had counted the cost, and was not disappointed in the result. But I had a large stock of cattle, and some way or other the grass must be cut. I offered extra wages, more than enough to pay the cost of the liquor usually furnished."

"They might have bought it themselves, with the money you paid them," suggested Elsie.

"Two or three proposed that; but I told them they could drink no liquor on my premises. Then Rhoda came to the rescue. She said, if I would get any one to do the work in the house she would help me about haying. I didn't like the looks of that, and it was some time before I would consent to it. Father had done the light work in the hay-field for two or three years; but his health was better than usual that summer, and he

thought he should be able to do some mowing. So, when I found there was no other way, I hired a girl in the house, and we began our work."

"How did grandfather like your plan?" asked Judson.

"He didn't fancy it at first; but he never liked to yield to opposition, and, before summer was through, he fully agreed with me."

"Did he help you mow?"

"Yes, and good help he was too. I used to tell him he was working beyond his strength; but he seemed quite as well when we were through as when we began."

"And did Aunt Rhoda work out-doors every day?" asked Mattie.

"She worked there every day when I did, and very often the whole family were in the hay-field."

"That was a happy summer, husband," said Mrs. Gray, who had again joined the group.

"I look back to it as one of the happiest of my life," was the reply. "Yet I never worked

harder. I made longer days than I have since, but everything prospered, and I got through haying as soon as some of my neighbors who had both rum and men."

"How did Aunt Rhoda like it?" asked Elsie.

"She enjoyed it as well as the rest, and she was as much interested as though the hay had been her own. Some of the young men used to laugh at her for doing a man's work; but she was too independent to care. She told them to wait ten years and see what kind of work their wives would be obliged to do."

"They have all done worse work than haying," said Mrs. Gray.

"And fared hard, too," added her husband. "Dec Rollins had the most to say, and his wife has certainly fared hard. She cut her foot the morning after Rhoda went to Reuben's, and the family were nearly in a starving condition. I forgot to speak of it before," he said, in reply to the expressions of surprise with which this intelligence was greeted. "Dr.

Webb told me of it this afternoon. Rhoda went there and got breakfast for them."

"What did they have?" asked Mrs. Gray.

"Hasty-pudding, with some skimmed milk that Mrs. Wines sent in. But Rollins has gone back to Felton's, and while he works there they can be comfortable, if he doesn't spend his wages at Lang's."

"Now, Mattie, tell us what you think of Aunt Rhoda," said Judson.

"I think she is good and smart," was the reply. "But she has a great many notions, and she is terribly particular."

"Mattie caught her mother's eye fixed upon her as she said this, and hastened to substantiate her charge by asking a question. "Don't you think it is foolish to have so many signs about everything?"

"Yes, my child, I do; but if you had heard them constantly since you were nine years old, they would seem of more importance than they do now. Mrs. Smith was a superstitious woman, and it isn't strange that Rhoda should be something

like her. As to being particular, if you had scoured the floor with soap and sand, you wouldn't quite like to have it covered with grease-spots; neither would you like to give it an extra sweeping after you had worked hard all day."

"I know I shouldn't, mother," was the frank reply, "and I'll try to remember it."

Some of Rhoda Smith's peculiarities annoyed Mrs. Gray scarcely less than her children. Faith and patience faltered in the presence of so many signs and wonders.

In her lonely, isolated life the orphan girl had learned to attach importance to the most trifling events, and a lively imagination, which, under proper culture, might have been the source of pleasure to herself and others, expended itself in foolish conceits and morbid fancies. The spilling of salt, and the buzzing of a bee, were both ominous, while the new moon was sure to bring good or evil luck, as it was seen over the right or left shoulder.

Whenever Rhoda was disappointed in any

plan or expectation, she was sure to remember some warning of evil. The visit to her cousin's had been decided upon as a matter of duty, and when tired with waiting, it was natural for her to feel that she ought to remain at home. Then, she was no sooner seated in the sleigh with her cousin than she found he had been indulging in his usual potations, and this increased her vexation, which was not removed by the events of the visit. Everything she saw and heard reminded her of the curse which had rested upon her own home.

Reuben Smith had been accustomed to drink from his earliest boyhood; and in this he but followed the example of his father. Yet he was never seen intoxicated. The draught which excited others almost to madness only stupefied him. He never terrified his wife with furious bursts of passion; but he neglected his business, and was exceedingly irritable when reminded of his shortcomings.

As a young man, he had been tolerably active, and when he bought a good farm,

there was a fair prospect that he would pay for it. But, instead of this, each year increased his indebtedness ; and, the property decreasing in value under his management, he was obliged to sell at a discount from the original price. He then purchased a cheap place, rough and stony, requiring hard work to make it at all productive. At the death of his father, two pieces of valuable land came into his hands ; but they were not long in his possession.

Mrs. Smith felt all this keenly. She had been an energetic woman until crushed by sorrow and disappointment, and had often remonstrated with her husband, telling him plainly the cause of all his troubles. But he only muttered in reply, solacing himself with an extra glass or a prolonged smoke.

At the time of Rhoda's visit, they were not really suffering from poverty, yet there was an evident want of everything beyond the bare necessities of life. Furniture needed to be replenished, and there was no provision for future wants. Within doors, there

was order and neatness, without confusion and want of cleanliness.

During the absence of her cousins, Rhoda improved the opportunity to look around. She went to the barn, examined the poorly cured hay, noted the appearance of the few cattle in the yard, and lastly explored the granary.

The result of this survey was far from satisfactory, and she betook herself to knitting with renewed energy. Later, as visions of the past flitted before her, her hands rested idly in her lap, while her eyes grew moist with tears.

The sound of bells roused her, and, when the door was opened, no trace of emotion was visible. "Well, Samantha, how did you leave Miss Rollins?" she asked.

"Comfortable," was the reply. "Dec went off and got a basketful of something to eat. I guess it came from Luther Balch's. He is going to Felton's in the morning."

"Who is going to take care of the children while their mother is lame?"

"They think they can get along among themselves, and there certainly isn't room for anybody else in the house. I thought our house was bad enough ; but that is a great deal worse."

This last remark was heard by Reuben Smith ; but, ignoring his presence, Rhoda replied, quickly, "That is just such a house as you might expect a drunkard to have. Lang dresses his wife and daughters in silk, and the poor men around here help him do it. There are plenty more in town not far behind Dec Rollins. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good plan for the women to set to and drink with their husbands. What should you think of it, Reuben?" she asked, looking her cousin full in the face.

"I never thought anything about it," he said, after some hesitation.

This evening was spent much like the preceding, only that the duties of the barn seemed to occupy much more time.

Truth to tell, a flask of liquor had been left there by Reuben Smith. It was of little con-

sequence to him whether his wife was pleased or displeased with his habits ; but he really feared his cousin.

He had ridiculed her when she was a child, taunted her with poverty, and sneered at every attempt she made at adornment. The tables were now turned. She was independent, asking no favors, and indifferent to his opinion. He went to the house with reluctance, and was glad to find that his guest had retired for the night.

The next two days were spent in work, and as a result, a respectable wood-pile appeared in the yard.

The monotony of the week was broken for Rhoda by an invitation to spend the day at the house of Mr. Balch. It was necessary to make some extra preparation for this visit, and as she stood before the little cracked mirror, with her unbound hair falling far below her waist, she had a dim perception of what she might have been.

This wealth of lustrous black hair would have made many women beautiful. She re-

membered when, with girlish pride, she had plaited it, twining among the braids the scarlet cardinal flower and the brilliant nasturtium. Then the sneers of her cousins. What had she to do with beauty? — she, a drunkard's child, with a gipsy face.

Ten years of her life she had been sheltered, and yet through all those years she had been homeless. At this thought, she gathered up her hair hastily, and, with a bitter smile upon her lips, turned away.

It was a relief to go out alone, into the keen, cold air, and in present exertion forget the past. Arrived at her destination, the cordial greetings she received, and the pleasant influences with which she was surrounded, softened her harsh moods.

Aunt Lizzie had always felt a most affectionate interest in Rhoda Smith. She knew the birthright of which she had been deprived, and the trials she had endured; and, knowing these, she was ever ready to excuse her peculiarities.

Several months had elapsed since they had

met for more than a passing salutation, and there was much to be said during this visit. When left by themselves, Rhoda seated herself on a low stool at the feet of her aged friend, just as she had often done when she was a child.

"You always make me think of my mother," she said, after a short silence. "When I come here, it seems almost like seeing her. I shouldn't be what I am now, if she had lived."

"Yet God knows what is best for us," was the reply. "It is a comfort to remember that."

"It may be comfort to some folks, but I never could see why 'twas best for me to lose my mother."

The voice that uttered these words was hard and cold, although the bowed head but half concealed the fast-falling tears.

"You may never in this world see why it was best," said Aunt Lizzie, tenderly; "but I hope the time will come when you will acknowledge God's hand in all your trials. You have had a great deal to be thankful for,"

she added, after a pause. "Many mercies have been mingled with your afflictions."

"What mercies have I had?" asked the listener, quickly; and then, as if abashed at her own ingratitude, she said, "Sometimes, everything looks very dark to me."

Without seeming to notice the apology implied in this remark, her companion replied to the strange question. "You have always had health and strength," she said. "You have found good friends, and you have been able to provide well for yourself. Think of Amy Hill. How much harder her life has been than yours! She lost both of her parents when she was very young, and she hardly knows what it is to be well. But she never complains. She believes God will take care of her, and so she trusts him with her whole heart."

"I haven't seen Amy for more than two years," was Rhoda's evasive reply. "She used to come to Mr. Gray's before she went to live with her aunt in the other part of the town. I always pitied her, she seemed so

feeble. I don't know how I should get along with so much sickness as she has."

"You ought to be thankful that it isn't sent upon you. She would consider such health as yours a great blessing. When you are a Christian you will count your mercies as well as your afflictions."

Her heart rebelled at the very thought of being a Christian. She praise God for his goodness? Never, until she could forget the old home on Cross Mountain, with the sufferings of her mother and herself.

Aunt Lizzie, quick to divine these thoughts, wisely led the conversation to other topics. She inquired for the health of Mrs. Gray, and talked of the children. "You have a pleasant home there," she said.

"I've no fault to find," was Rhoda's reply. "Mr. Gray and his wife have always treated me well; but it's as much as I can do to keep the kitchen in order. I expect there'll be great times while I'm gone. Mattie and Elsie think there is nothing to do but play and make a litter."

"You must expect a litter where there are children. I always like to see them happy if they do make some work. I guess our children think the kitchen belongs to them, and, after the chores are done at night, they have merry times there. They say Mr. Gray's girls are smart to work, and you mustn't begrudge them their play; you used to like play yourself."

"I didn't have much time for it though," said Rhoda. "There was nothing but work for me, after mother died."

"And you got tired of it," suggested the good old lady, who, knowing the want of sympathy between her guest and the younger members of the family with whom she lived, was anxious to promote a better feeling.

"I did get tired of it, and I wonder now, why all the work came to me."

Mrs. Luther Balch coming into the room at this moment, and, hearing the word work, said, with a smiling face, "I believe you really like work, Rhoda, and mother says work well done is twice done, so yours must all

be twice done. I wish some of our neighbors would follow your example. It would be a good thing if you'd give your Cousin Reuben some lessons."

"I've given him lessons enough, but he only grows worse. I shan't pity him much whatever happens; but I'm sorry for his wife. She's most discouraged."

"Samanthy does as well as she can," responded the old lady; "but she's broke down a good deal since Susan died. I was in hopes she'd come over with you to-day."

"She'd been glad to come. Her headache kept her at home."

"I'm afraid 'twas more heartache than headache," was the reply. "It's hard work for a woman to keep up when everything goes wrong out-doors. I've seen too much of that in my day. Lang gets too much of Reuben's money."

There was but one opinion in regard to this, and the merits of rumselling and rum-drinking were freely discussed. Thus occupied, they scarcely heeded the first falling

flakes of snow, until Mr. Balch coming in, said there was every appearance of a regular "north-easter."

"Then I had better go back before the storm gets any worse," said Rhoda, making haste to knit into her seam-needle.

This proposal, however, met with so much opposition that she was forced to yield the point, and, although she watched the clouds somewhat anxiously, nothing more was said in regard to leaving until night was closing in. Then Aunt Lizzie and her daughter proposed that their visitor should remain with them until the storm was over.

"The children will feel quite injured if you go without seeing them," said their mother. "You can be carried to your cousin's if you think you must go; but we should be very glad to have you stay."

If there was any hesitation in regard to accepting this invitation, it vanished when the children came in from school, bright, rosy, and happy.

"I was so glad father didn't come after us,"

said Lizzie, grandmother's namesake. "It was such fun to fight the snow."

"How many times did you fall down?" asked her brother George, laughing.

"Just six times," was the frank reply, "but that didn't hurt me. Mother says tumbles make us stronger, and I guess they do, for I feel pretty strong to-night."

"I should think you might feel strong every night," said her sister, a womanly girl of thirteen. "You have had tumbles enough in your life."

There was something in the appearance of these children which strongly attracted Rhoda Smith, and she was soon talking with them in a way that would have made Elsie Gray open her eyes with wonder.

"Will Mr. Smith come after you?" asked Lizzie of her new acquaintance.

"Perhaps he will," was the reply.

"I hope it will storm so hard he can't," said the child, earnestly, and by the time supper was over, and the doors of the old-fashioned cook-stove were thrown wide open,



POPPING CORN. Page 55.

lighting up and warming the farthest corner of the kitchen, Rhoda was ready to express the same hope. She saw the nuts and corn brought in, without the slightest feeling of impatience, and even tried her fortune with apple-seeds on the hot shovel.

Meantime the storm howled without, and huge drifts of snow were piled wherever an obstacle opposed its progress.

"We ought to be thankful for a comfortable home such a night as this," said Aunt Lizzie, who always counted the blessings of life rather than the trials.

"That is true, mother," responded her son, as a gust of unusual fury swept past. "We have some neighbors who will find it hard work to keep warm to-night."

"I should think Dec Rollins' house would be carried off," said George, as he held the corn over the hot fire.

"More danger of the barn than the house," was the reply; "but I guess he'll have some shovelling to do in the morning."

"It will do him good to work," said Mrs.

Balch. "A man with his strength ought to work."

"He is at work, now, for Nelson," replied her husband, "and since he went back, has done more than any two men in the shop. I saw him going home about dark, and he won't be likely to get far away to night."

"Now, father, you haven't played 'blind man's buff' with us for a great while," said Lizzie, who had been waiting some time for an opportunity to speak. "Won't you play with us to-night? I know mother will, and that will make enough. You'll play, — won't you?" she added, turning to Rhoda; and, strange to say, Rhoda joined in the game, and, what is more, she enjoyed it.

Aunt Lizzie looked on through the open door of the sitting-room, smiling at the innocent mirth which vented itself in ringing shouts of laughter.

Storm-bound, and content to be thus, the evening passed all too soon, and closed with a prayer, by the father of the family, for each one who found shelter beneath his roof.

Was it strange that half-sleeping, half-waking, with the wind howling hoarsely or shrieking shrilly, strange fancies should have thronged the brain of the guest?

She was a child again, sitting by the old well, in the sunshine, while the birds sang in the waving branches above her head. But soon the sky was overcast, the thunder muttered in the distance, and the gathering storm warned her that she must seek a place of refuge.

Her mother stood beside her. She grasped her hand firmly, and together they commenced climbing the mountain. Steep and rough was the path; her feet were bruised and bleeding. She faltered; suddenly she found herself alone, and the summit of the mountain far, far away; fainting, sinking, yet still struggling forward, urged by an irresistible impulse. Sometimes she reached out her hands involuntarily for support, but none was given; she clasped only emptiness.

Tossing restlessly from side to side, she welcomed the approach of morning, and

hailed with joy the first sounds of life in the house. Her thoughts assumed a more healthy tone. She reviewed the conversation of the previous day. She acknowledged that she had many blessings.

For the first time, she felt some regrets for having so often thwarted the wishes of the children at her home. In the hour between waking and rising there was time to form some good resolutions, and a resolve made by her was sure to manifest itself.

"You will stay with us another day, Rhoda," said her hostess, when they met that morning. "The roads can hardly be opened to-day, even if it should clear off before noon."

"Well-housed and thankful;" that was Aunt Lizzie's greeting. "I wish everybody was as well off as we are."

"I know I am well off," replied Rhoda; "but Samanthy will miss me to-day. We had planned to do some work that she can't do alone very well."

By nine o'clock the sun was shining

through the rifted clouds, and the tedious process of breaking out had commenced. Towards night Reuben Smith was seen coming up to the house, driving his oxen with unusual energy. The drifts were light, and the path easily made.

"Is Rhody ready to go home with me?" he asked of Mrs. Balch, who went to the door.

"We are not ready to have her go," she replied; "but I'll speak to her and see what she says. We were disappointed not to see your wife yesterday."

"She was having one of her poor turns," was the man's awkward reply.

It did not take Rhoda long to decide. Quite a comfortable seat had been prepared for her on the sled, and she proposed to occupy it.

She bade each member of the family good-by, taking the hand of Aunt Lizzie last. "I thank you for telling me of my mercies," she said; "I shall remember to count them, now."

"New every morning, and fresh every evening," was the reply.

"I should have come after you last night, if it hadn't stormed so," remarked Reuben, when they were about half-way home. "Samanthy was pretty much disappointed, but I told her I guessed you wouldn't want to come out in the storm, especially when you was in such good quarters."

Short reply was made to this. Rhoda was in no mood for talking, and they rode the remainder of the way in silence.

The oxen ploughed their way slowly through the drifts, and the house was reached at last. Here only the upper parts of the windows could be seen, and, in some places, the snow reached to the very eaves.

"I'm glad you've come," said Mrs. Smith, as her cousin entered; "seems as though I never was quite so lonesome as I've been to-day. I wanted Reuben to go after you last night; but I couldn't get him started."

"It's just as well," replied Rhoda; "I've had a good visit, and I guess I shall be the

better for it.—But you've been sick," she added, noticing the pale, haggard face.

"I don't think I'm sick, but I couldn't sleep last night. It seemed to me I could hear my children crying. I get tired of living sometimes."

"I'm sorry for you, Samanthy," said her friend; "I wish I could do something to help you; but 'it's a long road that has no turn,' and things may be better."

"Not while everything goes for drink."

Rhoda counted another blessing, — she was not a drunkard's wife.

"Have you heard from Miss Rollins?" she asked, hoping to interest her cousin in the troubles of her neighbor.

"Dec was here this morning, and he said she was getting along pretty well. He came down after a piece of pork for their dinner."

Reuben came in, rubbing his hands briskly, saying, as he did so, "I must mend up my barn as soon as the spring opens."

Cold air and exercise had quickened his blood and opened his eyes, but after supper

he relapsed into his usual drowsy state, thus giving his wife and cousin an opportunity to converse without any feeling of restraint.

Rhoda talked of her visit, and repeated the news she had heard. "I believe Aunt Lizzie loves everybody," she said, in concluding her account of some good deed done.

"I'm sure she does," rejoined Mrs. Smith, "and everybody loves her. If anybody is in trouble, she's the one to go to. When Susan was sick, she come over here, and was like a mother to me. I wish I was as good as she is."

Her companion echoed the wish, and thought of Amy Hill, who, a constant sufferer, and in a great measure depended upon others for a support, was yet happy and contented with her lot. She asked her cousin in regard to her.

Immediately the pale face lighted up with a new interest, as she said, "Amy's as good as Aunt Lizzie. She sent me some flowers to put in Susan's coffin, and I meant to go and see her before now. But it's too far

to walk, and Reuben never seems ready to go with me."

"Suppose we go over to-morrow. It will do you good to get out."

"I shall be glad to go if we can have the horse; only I should be ashamed not to carry something, and —"

"Never mind that," interrupted Rhoda, "I'll see to that part;" and, wishing to have the whole matter settled, she roused her cousin.

"You can have the horse," he said, in reply to her question; "but you'll find pretty hard going."

They had forgotten the recent storm and drifted roads.

"I was going down that way with the oxen, in a few days," said Reuben, after he had heard their plan. "I can go to-morrow as well as any time, and you can go, too, if you'll ride on the sled."

A sled was as good to them as a sleigh, so there were no objections on that score.

In talking of this proposed visit, Mrs. Smith became quite cheerful, and, after consideration,

she found that even from her scanty store some things could be spared which might be of use to persons situated as were Amy Hill and her aunt.

Refreshed by a night's quiet sleep, she was moving about her kitchen early the next morning, and greeted her cousin with something like animation! "It's going to be a fine day, and I want to get started in season, so to have plenty of time."

Reuben, for once, did hurry a little, and was ready as soon as his passengers.

Mrs. Lunt and her niece lived a little off the main road, but they had not been neglected by their neighbors. A path had been broken up to their door, while shovel and broom had laid bare the large, flat door-stone.

Nowhere could a visit have been more acceptable. It was a great pleasure to the occupants of this humble home to see their friends, and this pleasure was expressed so earnestly and simply as to put their visitors in sympathy with them.

Amy, who was the chief attraction, sat in

an easy-chair by a south window, where the sunlight just glanced upon her golden hair. On a small stand by her side were a fragrant geranium, with a pot of mignonette now in blossom, whose mingled perfumes pervaded the whole room. A Bible rested upon the same stand, so that her treasures were all within reach. It was one of her best days, when the expression of weariness and pain left the pure, sweet face.

"I was wishing this morning that some one would come ; but I didn't expect it," she said. "I think Aunt Milly has been getting lonesome through the storm. Yesterday, when we first got up, we couldn't see out for the snow ; but our neighbors remembered us."

Rhoda could say but little. She looked at the crutches, without the aid of which Amy Hill could not even stand, and added another to her already long list of acknowledged blessings.

Mrs. Smith was gratified by the assurance that she had brought just what was most needed.

"I have nothing to give you in return but my thanks and prayers," said Amy. "There are some in this world whom God allows to work, while others only wait. I am only waiting. I have hoped that the time would come when I might work; but my Heavenly Father knows what is best for me."

Rhoda sat down beside her, clasping the emaciated hands in her own hard palms. Alike orphaned, and tracing their misfortunes back to the same cause, how unlike had been their lives! The strong woman, who had been allowed to work, was fain to kneel at the feet of her who was "only waiting."

Won by gentle words, she allowed this friend to look into her heart and see the ingratitude she had cherished.

"It always seemed so hard that I was left alone," she said, partly in extenuation of her fault. "Other children had somebody to take care of them, but I had to fight my own way."

"I know how hard it is," was the reply. "I've often thought of you; but you are so

strong; I didn't know as you felt it as I have."

"I've thought 'twas hard for me to have to work, too," said Rhoda, in a tone of bitter self-reproach.

A sudden quivering of the clasped hands told how this confession stirred the feelings of the listener. "Perhaps you never'll think so again," she said, after a short silence.

"*I know* I never shall," was the reply. "I've learned a lesson from you."

"Have I done you any good?" asked Amy, looking tenderly at her companion.

Tears answered this question, and, as if fearing to trust herself further, Rhoda began fumbling in a bag which hung on her arm. After considerable delay, she took from it an old netted purse, and emptied the contents into the lap of her friend.

Amy opened her lips to remonstrate, but was soon silenced.

"I want you to have it," said Rhoda, and there was evidently more pleasure in giving than receiving.

After this there was time for Amy to have the long talk she so much desired with Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Lunt, on hospitable thoughts intent, placed the little round table in the centre of the kitchen, and spread it with the best her pantry afforded. Then, when all were seated around it, she asked a blessing upon the food provided, and, by her genial manners, made the plain fare seem luxurious.

Each incident of that visit was one to be treasured for long years, and each word lingered in the memory like a strain of sweetest music.

III.

“God knows best; though dark clouds lower,
Still he reigns, supreme, above,
Matchless, in his wondrous power,
Meting out each fate, in love.”

NEVER, since the earliest days of her childhood, had Rhoda Smith risen from her bed with so light a heart as on the morning after her visit to Amy Hill.

The current of life flowed strongly through her veins. Not a pulse throbbed with pain, not a nerve quivered. Existence itself seemed a blessing, and she was disposed to look upon the world with charity. There was no fault-finding in the tone with which she addressed her cousin. Breakfast was a cheerful meal.

Reuben looked at her in astonishment. “I’ve just found out what’s the matter with you,” he said, at length. “You’ve got your hair done up a new way, and it makes you look ten years younger.”

Samantha turned towards her, then exclaiming, "I couldn't think what made you look so different yesterday; but I never noticed your hair. Where did you get that notion?"

"Lizzie Balch wanted Mary to do it up like her mother's, when I was there. I liked it pretty well, so I thought I'd try it myself."

"Well, I wouldn't go back again to the old way. It makes a wonderful change in your looks; but I believe you've got more hair on your head than any other three women in town."

Rhoda had no desire to hear any more upon this subject, and soon managed to turn the attention from herself by reminding her cousin that his wife needed a new dress.

"I didn't know but she had dresses enough," he said, in reply. "She haint said anything to me about it."

"She never said anything to me about it either; but I found it out, and it's just

the time now to have it made, while I'm here."

All this was said pleasantly and confidently, as though the buying of a dress was an every-day occurrence in the family; while, in truth, it was more than two years since a dress of any kind had been bought for Samantha Smith. The proposition was as much of a surprise to her as to her husband, and, although needing a dress, she regretted that anything had been said about it. The very mention of a new dress was sufficient to put her husband in ill-humor for several days, and he never could see what women wanted of so many new dresses.

To turn and remake an old black dress was the work planned for the day, and, in talking of this, Rhoda learned how scanty was the wardrobe of her hostess. She decided upon an addition, and, nothing daunted by the reply she had received, volunteered the information that "Starkey brought up some handsome merinos. Miss Lang was buying one, the last time I was in there. There

aint a woman in town dresses better than she does; but their money comes easy, and she can afford to spend it."

Reuben winced at this. He expected to be told that his money went to support Lang's wife rather than his own; but he was entirely mistaken.

"Lang must be pretty well off," said Mrs. Smith.

"Folks say so," replied Rhoda; "but when he came here he couldn't pay his debts. Selling liquor must be more profitable than drinking it, for he grows rich as his customers grow poor."

Here was another thrust at Reuben, who took down his pipe and commenced filling it, preparatory to his usual smoke, which, for obvious reasons, he preferred enjoying in the barn that morning.

"Are you going to the village, to day?" asked his cousin, when she found he was likely to escape her.

"Guess not," he replied; although he had intended to go before noon.

"Well, then, we can wait till to-morrow. I guess we shall have time after that to make the dress before I go back. There, Samantha, I guess you'll get your dress," she added, as the door closed after the man and the pipe.

"Perhaps I shall," was the reply; "but I'd always rather go without anything than ask for it."

"Ask for it," repeated Rhoda; "if I wanted a dress, I'd have it. There's no use in being afraid to take your rights in this world. I learned that a good while ago. Half the men pay more for rum and tobacco than it would take to clothe their families, and then complain that they can't get along, because the women folks are so extravagant."

Having said this in a somewhat excited tone, she commenced cutting and piecing with great energy, and before night a worn and rusty garment was transformed into quite a presentable dress.

It was just completed when the sound of approaching bells was heard. "That is Mr.

Gray," said Rhoda. "Miss Gray must be sick. I heard a bell in my left ear last night, and I knew something would happen.

She met Mr. Gray at the door, and inquired for the health of his wife, before he had an opportunity to speak.

"She's about as usual," was the reply. "Of course we miss you; but she gets along better than I expected. I got a letter for you this morning, and, as I was going to Nelson's, I thought I'd come round this way, and bring it. It's sealed with black, and I guess it comes from one of your uncles."

The reception of a letter was an event in the life of Rhoda Smith, and she broke the large, black seal with trembling fingers.

Mr. Gray came in to hear what news this letter might contain. There were but few lines, announcing the death of the writer's wife and daughters. These deaths had left him quite alone, with the exception of his servants, and in his loneliness he thought of the niece whose existence he had before ignored.

He expressed regret that they had so long

been strangers, and invited her to visit him. "I would visit you," he said, in conclusion, "but I am too much of an invalid to go far from home."

When Rhoda had read the letter, she gave it to Mr. Gray, saying, as she did so, "It's rather late in the day to look me up. I've got along so far without my mother's relations, and I can the rest of my life."

"This uncle of yours is a rich man," said Mr. Gray, as he returned the letter. "He was pretty well advanced in life before he married, and his daughters must have been quite young." Then, after a moment's thought, he added, "He was the oldest of the family, and that would make him more than seventy. As he says, he is a lonely old man, it might be for your advantage to go there."

"It's no place for me," she answered. "I wasn't brought up in city fashions, and I'm too old to learn new ways."

"Perhaps not," said her friend; "but we shall have plenty of time to talk about

that after you come home. When shall we expect you?" he asked, rising to go.

"I calculate to be back in two weeks from the time I came away, if nothing happens," was the reply.

The letter furnished a topic of conversation for the evening, and Rhoda recalled much that she had heard of her mother's family. She knew they had all been wealthy, and that their children were well educated and accomplished.

It was well that a vision of Amy Hill rose before her at the thought of this, for her heart beat tumultuously at the contrast her own life presented.

"I should think you'd go to see your uncle," said Samantha. "I'm sure I should, if I was in your place. He'll leave his money to somebody when he dies."

"I suppose he will," answered Rhoda. "He can't carry it with him, and I hope it will do some good when he's gone. As for going there, I know too much to make a

laughing stock of myself. If Uncle William wants to see me, he can come where I am."

"Guess you'd better go," said Reuben. "You might come in for a share of his property, if you managed right."

"I've been able to earn what money I needed, so far," replied his cousin; "and if I have my health, I shan't have to go begging to any of my relations, for the time to come."

The even tenor of her life was broken. The suggestions and counsel of Aunt Lizzie Balch had given rise to new thoughts and many regrets.

Trial and discipline had neither subdued nor softened her naturally proud spirit. Obligated, by the circumstances in which she had been placed during her girlhood, to resist injustice, it was not strange that she had become harsh and unyielding. Forced to demand the consideration which should have been cheerfully given, she was, even now, inclined to be jealous of her rights.

This made her overbearing, and all unconsciously she had indulged the feeling until it marred her whole character.

Yet she had not known this. When people were praised for amiability, she attributed it to the fact that they had always been prospered. It was natural that such persons should thank God for all his mercies ; but, as for herself, her life had been too dark.

During her visit to Amy Hill some scales fell from her eyes, and she was beginning to see her own heart. There was a struggle now between the newly awakened feelings and the bitter memories of her early days.

She became silent, and was in danger of forgetting the business of the next day, when, turning towards an uncurtained window, she noticed the moonlight streaming through.

"Fair weather to-morrow," said Reuben.

"Then we can go to the village," replied Rhoda. "Samanthy must have some of that merino at Starkey's."

"Then, I suppose that's settled," said Reu-

ben, with a sorry attempt at a laugh. "You always would have your own way; but it's pretty hard for me to spare the money now."

"It can be charged to your account, if that suits you any better."

"That won't help the matter much. It's got to be paid some time. I need some clothes, myself; but I can't afford to have them."

"You might afford them, if—" Here Rhoda stopped.

"If what?" he asked, involuntarily.

"If you would stop drinking. You know it as well as I do. The money you have paid Lang since he came here would settle all your debts, and give you something in hand. I didn't mean to say anything more about that," she added, observing the distressed look upon the face of Mrs. Smith. "I have faults enough to look after of my own."

This last conclusion astonished her companions. It was the first time they had heard her acknowledge so much, and Reuben looked at her as though half inclined to doubt the evidence of his senses. "I guess we all

have plenty of faults, if we could only see them," he said, at length. "I'm sure I have."

"Then the best thing we can do is to mend them. I, for one, am going to try. Good-night."

The door closed. "That didn't sound much like Rhody; I wonder what's come over her; I never heard her talk like that before."

"I guess she's right, Reuben," replied his wife. "We'd better follow her example."

"Well, Samantha, I know things aint going right with us, and I'm the one to blame. Rhody hit the nail on the head about money. It's true, every word of it, and I hardly know which way to turn."

"I can do without a dress, this winter."

"That won't make much difference. You might as well have it. I wish sometimes that Lang and his crew were all out of the way. A man never knows how much he drinks till he comes to pay for it."

"I wish you'd give up drinking," said the wife.

"I wish I could."

The next moment he regretted this expression. Abstinence for one day had proved almost unendurable. He had intended to go to the village, and his principal business was to buy liquor; but, rather than take his wife and cousin with him, he had denied himself his usual indulgence.

"Guess I made a fool of myself that time," he muttered, when out of hearing. "Samanthy won't forget that very soon."

The next day proved as pleasant as had been anticipated. The dress was bought, Rhoda Smith paying for the trimmings.

On their way home they called at the house of Dexter Rollins, and found his wife much better than they had expected. A decided improvement was also seen in the looks of the house and children. There had been a liberal use of soap and water, which was easily accounted for when Mrs. Rollins told her visitors that Aunt Lizzie came to see her the day before.

"We've got lots to eat," whispered the

oldest girl to Mrs. Smith. "Father brings home something most every night, and he don't ever scold a word. He washed the floor all up clean last night, and told me I musn't let it get dirty a bit to-day."

"You've kept it looking very nice," was the reply.

"That's what mother says, and I guess father'll think I've been a good girl," said the child, artlessly.

The simple recital told of a wondrous change in this family, and Mrs. Smith listened with great interest. She had known before that Dexter Rollins was at work, and she now felt sure that his wages were spent for the benefit of his family.

This, though cause for rejoicing, but made her own lot seem harder. Even the praises so liberally bestowed upon the new merino could not dissipate her sadness. After all, the dress was of little consequence when she had no heart to wear it.

Her visitor, on the contrary, seemed quite exhilarated, and no sooner were they at home

than she set to work in good earnest, resolved to "have the job done right off." "You've needed this long enough, not to wait for it now," she said.

"Guess Luther Balch and his wife will come here this evening," said Reuben Smith, just before dark. "I saw him at the village, and he said they'd come. I'll make up a fire in the other room."

"No need of that," said Rhoda. "It's more comfortable here."

"Guess I'd better," said the man. "They don't come very often."

So the fire was made and the neighbors came in good season. Mrs. Balch brought her knitting, and, seated in the best rocking-chair, worked and talked with equal ease.

For some reason, the men preferred the kitchen, and once when Rhoda went out for paper to cut a pattern, she heard the words, "Lang, mortgage."

Reuben Smith being deeply in debt, and unable to meet the demands against him, had applied to his neighbor for assistance,

offering to give him a mortgage upon his place as security. Mr. Balch had promised to think of the proposition, and came up that evening to talk the matter over.

In anticipation of this interview, Reuben had refrained from drinking through the day, so that his head was much clearer than usual, and he saw his condition in its true light.

His neighbor was a shrewd business man, and a prosperous farmer. More than this, he was a thoroughly good man, ever ready to lend a helping hand to those about him. It was this last trait which made him so often consulted in cases of difficulty and embarrassment. Every one knew that he would counsel wisely and act generously.

Reuben Smith had applied to others for aid ; but all had failed him, and, as his last resort, he appealed to this man, from whom he must expect severe censure for his habits.

"I should want a full statement of your affairs before I could do anything," said Mr. Balch, pleasantly but firmly.

There was no reply to this.

"I must know who are your creditors, and to what amount," he added. "I am always opposed to working in the dark."

No one could complain of this, and, after some hesitation, Reuben began his statement. He prefaced this, however, by attributing his condition to bad luck and poor crops.

"Never mind that," said his companion, with a gesture of impatience. He had heard enough of that before.

One debt after another was enumerated, but nothing was said of Lang.

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Balch, when his neighbor paused.

"I suppose I'm owing Lang a little something," was the reply.

"How much?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know!" repeated the questioner, in a tone of astonishment. "That's bad; but can't you give something of a guess?"

Reuben Smith shook his head.

"I am disposed to help you," said Mr. Balch; "but, as things are now, it would

do no good. You know the cause of your troubles as well as I do. You wouldn't have poor crops if you cultivated your land, and bad luck is another name for bad management."

Plain talking this; but the man to whom it was addressed knew that it was the truth.

"How much money have you paid Lang since he came into town?" asked Mr. Balch, determined, if possible, to bring his neighbor to a square confession.

Another shake of the head, but no word of reply.

"You must keep an account-book. You certainly can tell by referring to that."

"I never kept any account with him," replied Reuben, in a low tone.

"Worse yet. No wonder you are in debt. Now, if I should advance the money you want, in a year's time you would be worse off than you are now. If I could see any reasonable prospect of your trying to do better, I would gladly help you; but as long as you patronize Lang without know-

ing what he charges to your account, it's of no use."

"Guess he's honest," said the arraigned man, not knowing what else he *could* say.

"An honest rumseller is a character I never heard of, and I can assure you that Lang is no exception to the general rule. Ten chances to one but you've paid for twice the liquor you ever got of him."

A new idea took possession of Reuben Smith's brain, and, in his haste to give it utterance, he did not see that in so doing he would criminate himself still more deeply. "His account is always a great deal larger than I expect," he said, quickly. "I've told him so half a dozen times; but he always makes it appear all right, so I've paid it."

"Poor way of doing business,—is'nt it, Reuben?"

"Yes," he replied, with a blush. "Guess I haint been quite sharp enough for him."

Mrs. Smith now put an end to the consultation by inviting the gentlemen to adjourn to the other room.

"If you make any new plans, you can let me know, and remember that I shall be glad to help you when I can." Mr. Balch said this in a low tone to his neighbor, when they parted that evening, and its import was perfectly understood. He had not said in so many words, "I will do nothing for you so long as you continue the habit of drinking;" but such was, evidently, his decision.

During the next two days, Rhoda Smith talked far more than usual concerning the fashions, while the relative merits of gathers and plaits were discussed at length by her cousin and herself. When the last stitch was taken in the new dress, which had been the object of so much anxiety, satisfied that something had really been accomplished during her visit, she was ready to return to Mr. Gray's.

Poor Mrs. Smith could hardly speak of her leaving, without tears, and even Reuben was sorry to have her go. Yet, punctually on the day appointed, the old bells were heard, and

Amos ran to the window "to see Aunt Rhoda first."

The kitchen had been put in the best order, that she might have no reason for finding fault; but she did not seem to notice it. Her interest was entirely absorbed in the health and happiness of the family. Mrs. Gray observed that her voice was less harsh than usual, and that her face wore a softer expression.

She petted and caressed Amos to his heart's content, and seemed impatient to see the older children. When they came, there was a longer delay than usual at the door, lest for want of care some tracks might be made upon the floor; but, greatly to their surprise, Aunt Rhoda called to them to "come in, and not stop there scraping any longer."

The story of her life, which they had heard from their father, had so filled their hearts with sympathy, that they were prepared to humor all her whims, and on their way home that evening, Mattie and Elsie had decided to do "just what she wanted them to." Their

greeting was cordial, but very quiet, and they moved about noiselessly.

This was just what would have pleased Rhoda a month before, but now she really longed to hear their voices in shouts of laughter. It troubled her to feel that her presence was a restraint upon their actions.

The change in her appearance was soon noticed, and Elsie whispered to her mother that Aunt Rhoda had grown pretty while she was away.

"You've made a great improvement in the way of putting up your hair," said Mrs. Gray. "The children think you've grown pretty."

"I hope I've grown better," was the unexpected reply. "There was need enough of it."

Mr. Gray was glad to see Rhoda, and said so, heartily, adding, "I don't see how we can ever spare you so long again, unless you get married, or go to see your Uncle William. In either of those cases, I suppose we must waive our claims."

"If that's the case, you won't lose me at

present. I couldn't find a better home, and I've no idea of visiting Uncle William."

"Then you must answer the letter very soon. That's the least you can do."

"Dear me! I never can do that," said Rhoda, in so mournful a tone as to provoke the laughter of the children; and thus the subject was dropped.

"Aunt Rhody, won't you please to tell me some stories after supper?" asked Amos, in so loud a whisper as to be distinctly heard by all in the room.

"What shall I tell about?" asked Rhoda.

"About the children where you went. I want to know if they ever make a litter. Mattie says I mustn't any more. You don't like to have a litter, — do you, Aunt Rhody?"

Elsie, who was ever on the alert to catch the first intimation of a story, overheard this remark, and shook her head warningly. Amos expected a reply; but none was given, and a call to supper soon made him forget that he had asked the question.

Yet he did not forget to ask for the stories,

to which he listened with almost breathless attention. Others listened with him, and, much to her surprise, Rhoda found herself giving an animated description of her visit.

Mr. and Mrs. Gray were much interested in Amy Hill, and anxious to know of her situation.

"She says everybody is very kind to them," was the reply to a question concerning her means of support. "It seems to me, though, they must have a hard time to get along."

"We can send them something," said Judson. "We have enough of everything, and we can all work."

"We *will* send them something," responded Mr. Gray.

"We will see, to-morrow, what we can find in the house that will be acceptable to them," added Mrs. Gray. "Perhaps I shall be able to go down there when the weather is milder."

"Amy Hill is another orphan girl, — isn't she, father?" asked Elsie.

"Yes," was the reply ; "and she is a most unfortunate one. She has always been sick."

"That's a good deal worse than to be well like you, Aunt Rhody," said Amos, with the utmost simplicity.

"I've found out that I've been very well off compared with Amy," she replied. "'Twould do me good to see her once a week, the rest of my life."

"It would do us all good to see such an example of Christian faith and patience. We are all inclined to magnify our trials and overlook our mercies."

Rhoda gave a decided nod of approval, as Mr. Gray said this ; her own experience testifying to its truth.

The next morning she resumed her place in the family, taking the responsibility of the work, not as a burden, but as a pleasure, and the days passed on, unmarked by any event of special interest. Indeed, everything moved so smoothly that the children were disposed to complain of the monotony.

Meanwhile, there was a neglected duty, of

which Rhoda was often reminded. Her uncle's letter remained unanswered. Having no desire to make his acquaintance, she did not wish to write to him, and, moreover, it was no easy task for her to prepare such a letter. An imperative sense of duty at last overcame her objections, and, after several unsuccessful efforts, she accomplished the task.

"I'm glad it's done," she said, as she gave the letter to Mr. Gray. "It's my first letter to any of the Daltons, and I guess 'twill be the last."

But, after this, she often thought of her uncle, in his loneliness, and gradually a feeling of sympathy found place in her heart.

The old pride was giving way, and a second visit to Amy Hill helped forward the good work. When the time came that Mr. Gray was going to the part of the town in which she lived, his wife was unable to accompany him, and Rhoda went in her stead.

Sitting by the pleasant south window, she

found her friend, who extended both her thin hands in glad welcome.

"You came in the right time," said Amy. "I was wishing to see you. After you were gone, the other day, I thought of a great deal to say to you. I didn't half thank you for your generous gift."

"You've nothing to thank me for," was the reply. "I only wish I'd come to see you before. I believe I should have been better if I had, and I never want you to thank me again."

Mr. Gray came in with a most generous donation, and, as usual, it was just what was needed. Mrs. Lunt said the basket contained "a little of most everything, and a great deal of many things." Each of the children had added to the store after their parents had made their selection. Amos sent the largest, rosiest apples he could find, while Judson contributed a book in which he had been himself much interested.

There was soft, warm flannel, cut from

a web, recently sent home, and there were several skeins of fine, homespun yarn, all given gladly for the comfort of the invalid. In the way of food, also, there were many delicacies as well as substantial articles.

But Mr. Gray, in his words of Christian sympathy, gave more than all these, and the prayer which he offered strengthened the hearts of these lone women, even more than the choicest food strengthens the body.

"That prayer carried me almost to heaven," said Amy, when the door closed behind their friend. "It's always a comfort to hear Christians pray."

For once, Rhoda Smith wished she was a Christian, that she might know the blessedness of prayer. Morning and evening she had listened to Mr. Gray; but the words of his petitions were unheeded. Others spoke of the humble, loving faith which always characterized his prayers; but her ears were dull that they did not hear. She could not respond to the joyous exclama-

tion of one whose trust was stayed on God, and to whom communion with him was the dearest earthly privilege.

She was to wait there for Mr. Gray's return; and Mrs. Lunt, occupied in examining the gifts they had received, left the friends to themselves, interrupting them only to exhibit her treasures.

"Why, Amy, here are enough of some things to last you for years," said her aunt, as she took the last package from the basket. "Mr. Gray and his wife will never want for the good things of this life. His word is sure, who said, 'Give, and it shall be given to you again.'"

Amy seemed inclined to talk of her childhood, and her companion was glad to hear how another had lived, bereft of father and mother. There were some parts of her life passed over in silence. They were too painful to be recalled.

"My father's relatives were too poor to help me, and my mother's family were all dead, except Aunt Milly. She was living

with her husband then, and couldn't give a home. When he died, she came here, and now I feel as though I had somebody to care for me."

This led Rhoda to speak of her own relatives, and the letter she had received. "I don't remember any of mother's family," she said. "They never cared anything about me, and I don't care about them. They might have taken care of mother, and then, perhaps, she would have lived. I don't see what made Uncle William think of me now."

"Perhaps he has changed since he was younger," replied Amy, gently. "He must be a lonely old man. We, both of us, know what it is to be alone in the world."

"He has a great deal of money," said Rhoda. "He can have everything he wants."

"Money won't always buy the care and attention a sick person needs. Perhaps you might do him a great deal of good. It isn't right to cherish hard feelings," added Amy, as she saw the flush on Rhoda's face. "It is better to forgive. We all do wrong."

"I know *I* do, for one," replied Rhoda, with much feeling. "I wish I was better."

"That is my constant wish and prayer. I deserve nothing but punishment, yet every day I receive good from the hand of the Lord. He puts it into the hearts of his children to supply my wants."

These words had hardly passed the lips of the speaker, when a spasm of pain convulsed her whole frame. Her aunt sprang to her assistance, making use of such remedies as had often before given relief. Rhoda lent her aid, and, after some moments of extreme suffering, the tense muscles relaxed, and the features resumed their natural expression.

The struggles of the sufferer seemed to Rhoda like the very agonies of death, as she stood with hushed breath by the bed on which Amy had been placed. "Does she often have such attacks?" she asked, in a low voice.

"She used to have them very often," was the reply. "This is the first for several weeks, and I was in hopes she wouldn't

have any more. It seems as though she had suffered enough."

"God knows best," whispered Amy, still submissive to his will.

She was too much exhausted to say more, and Rhoda, having smoothed her pillow, and passed her hand caressingly over the beautiful golden hair, turned away with tearful eyes.

"Have you everything you need, which money can buy?" she asked of Mrs. Lunt.

"I think so," replied the good woman. "We have some of the money left that you gave Amy. I had a little, myself, the first of January, and everybody seems to have remembered us since then. We needed some flannel more than anything else, but thought we'd try and get along without till next fall."

Mr. Gray soon drove up, and Rhoda prepared to leave. Amy was able to say only a few words to her, but those few made a deep impression.

During the ride home she was so little inclined to talk that her companions gave up all attempts at conversation.

"Do you think I ought to go and see Uncle William?" she asked, abruptly, after a long silence.

This question so astonished Mr. Gray that he waited for a moment before replying. "I suppose you ought to be the best judge in regard to that," he said, at length. "If he writes again, urging you to come, I should favor your going."

"Then I'll wait till he writes again," she said, glad to dispose of the matter thus easily.

When she reached home, every member of the family wished to hear of Amy Hill. Even the condition of the plants, and the amount of sunlight streaming through the windows, must be reported.

There was now a strong bond of sympathy between Aunt Rhoda and the children. Elsie told Judson, confidentially, that she believed something very strange was going to happen. "It's something good, too, I know," she added, "for I saw the moon over my right shoulder."

Her brother's laugh was supplemented by her own as she realized the absurdity of the reason she had given, but she still assured him that he would "see something strange before long."

Despite this prophecy, nothing remarkable transpired, except the ever-recurring miracle of spring. Then, sugar-making, with its labors and pleasures, absorbed the interest of all; and, when this was over, the well-prepared ground received the seed that was to be quickened to a new life. April, with its fitful showers, and May, with its long sunny days, passed quickly; June came, and the gladness of summer found an echo in every heart.

On one of the brightest mornings of this flower-crowned month, the landlord of the village tavern drove towards Farmer Gray's, wondering as he went. A gentleman had come to his house the night before, and from him he carried a letter to Rhoda Smith.

This gentleman was a stranger, and the best efforts of the landlord had failed to

elicit the information he so much desired. The fashion of registering names had not reached this village, so that he was ignorant of even the name of his guest.

Mr. Lang met Mr. Gray a short distance from his house. "I guess I've got a letter for one of your folks," he said. "A man came to my house, in the stage, last night, and this morning he inquired for a young lady by the name of Rhoda Smith. I couldn't think of anybody except the Rhoda at your house, but I never heard anybody call her a young lady."

Mr. Gray had no desire to prolong this conversation, and, taking the letter, turned back to the house, where he found Rhoda busily engaged in butter-making. "Here is another letter from your Uncle William," he said, as he held it before her.

"I can't stop to read it now," she replied. "I suppose it can wait."

"I judge not," said Mr. Gray. "Lang just brought it over, and he said the writer was at his house."

"It can't be that Uncle William is there."

"Read your letter, and you will know."

"Suppose you read it. My hands are full."

"Shall I break the seal?"

"I wish you would," said Rhoda.

Mr. Gray opened the letter and read the contents aloud.

William Dalton had come to his native village, and wished his niece to call upon him at "the hotel." He was very much fatigued with his journey, and did not feel able to ride that morning.

Rhoda had seated herself at the first word of the letter, and when the reading closed, she was too much astonished to speak.

"You must go right over to the village," said the reader. "I'll harness up and go with you. We'll bring your uncle back with us, if he'll come."

"There's no need of being in a hurry. I should like to know who's going to take care of this butter if I go off?"

This was said in a sharp tone, now so

rarely heard, which was, in itself, a proof that Rhoda was greatly excited.

"I can take care of the butter," said Mrs. Gray, coming in only in time to hear the last remark.

Her husband told her of the arrival at the village, and she urged her friend not to lose any time in answering the message.

"There's a great deal of work to be done this morning," objected Rhoda.

"Never mind that," was the reply. "That is no excuse for keeping your uncle waiting."

"You must wear your new dress, Aunt Rhoda," said Elsie, who had found her way into the council.

"I guess I'd better comb my hair before I think of a dress," was the reply.

For some reason she made slow progress in arranging her hair, and, had it not been for the assistance of Mattie, she would hardly have reached the village before noon. She wore the new dress, and Elsie was gratified by being allowed to arrange the collar and ribbon.

"I never was so long getting ready before," said Rhoda, by way of apology, to Mr. Gray, as they started off. "I wish Uncle William had stayed at home."

Her companion reassured her, and, by the time she reached the village, she was quite prepared to meet her relative.

Mr. Lang was standing upon the piazza, and ushered her into the sitting-room. Her uncle came in directly, leaning upon his cane, and seeming to walk with difficulty. "This is my niece," he said, looking at her closely. "I should have known you anywhere, you are so like your mother. I am very glad to see you."

This allusion to her mother so affected Rhoda, that it was with a great effort she murmured a reply.

"You were not expecting to see me this spring," said her uncle.

"No, sir, I never thought of your coming here."

"I never thought of it myself until a few weeks ago. I was afraid I shouldn't see you if

I remained at home, so I felt obliged to come to you. I was very anxious to see you."

If Rhoda Smith could have honestly said that she was glad to see her uncle, she would have done so; but, as she could not, she allowed him to do most of the talking.

Mr. Dalton had seen much of the world, and, being a close observer of human nature, he read, at a glance, the character of his niece. He recognized the proud spirit, so in sympathy with his own, and calculated the possibilities of her life.

She was not one to sue for favors, or accept them unless cheerfully given. Perhaps she was different from what he had expected to find her, — if, indeed, he had any expectations in regard to her. He knew that it was late to make amends for long neglect, and this made him ill at ease.

He asked her of her home and prospects.

"I work for what I have," she replied, frankly. "My home has been at Mr. Gray's for several years. He and his wife have always treated me like a sister."

"Gray," repeated the gentleman. "I think I remember a family of that name. They were good people."

"Mr. Gray is a good man," said Rhoda. "He came over with me, this morning. — There he is, just opposite," she added, looking from the window.

"I should like to speak with him," replied her uncle, and Mr. Gray soon gave him an opportunity.

He crossed the street, and opened the door of the room occupied by Mr. Dalton and his niece. Rhoda introduced the gentlemen to each other, and then left them, while she went to the village store.

The acquaintance progressed rapidly, and when she returned she found that her uncle had already consented to be the guest of Mr. Gray.

"Perhaps I should first have asked my niece if such an arrangement would be agreeable to her," he said, as he noticed the expression of surprise with which this announcement was received.

"Mr. Gray has a right to invite what company he pleases," she replied, coldly. "I never interfere about that."

The next moment she regretted what she had said, and was glad to have her rudeness covered by the quick response of her friend.

"I can assure you of one thing, Mr. Dalton, — Rhoda will give you some very nice things to eat, and take the best of care of you, if you are sick. She is famous both as nurse and cook."

"I have sadly needed a nurse during the last winter," replied Mr. Dalton. "With wife and children gone, an old man like myself is not likely to get very tender care. I used to think money would buy all that any one can need, but I've found out my mistake."

The speaker looked directly at his niece while saying this. Their eyes met, and her heart gave a quick bound of sympathy, but she would not express it.

At that moment, Mr. Gray saw a neighbor coming down the street in a lumber-wagon,

and went out to speak with him. Returning directly, he told Rhoda that she could ride home with her uncle.

"And how will you go?" she asked.

"With Mr. Brown. I shall be a little later than you, but that will make no difference."

Rhoda was about to object to this, but upon second thought, concluded to make the best of what was to her an unpleasant necessity. Mr. Dalton settled his bill with the landlord, had his trunk brought out, and was then ready to go.

"I shall leave the driving to you," he said to his niece. "I am glad to avoid all exertion."

Two or three times during the drive he made some remark in regard to the history of their family, but he found it impossible to engage his companion in conversation upon that subject. She grew, every moment, more and more uncomfortable, and most heartily did she wish that she had been permitted to go on with her butter-making that morning.

She wondered how she could ever "get along with that man in the house ;" what she should say to him ; while, most of all, she wondered how long a visit he would make.

Mrs. Gray was not surprised to see the stranger, whom she welcomed as cordially as she would a relative of her own. The children were all presented to him, and, although much fatigued, he had a pleasant word for each, which quite won their hearts.

A large, airy chamber was made ready, and when Mr. Gray arrived his guest seemed quite at home. As for Rhoda, she had taken off the new dress, and was hard at work. No one would have supposed that she was at all interested in the occupant of the sitting-room.

Mattie and Elsie offered to do anything that was necessary ; but she refused all assistance. Mrs. Gray was troubled, yet she knew, by experience, that expostulation would be useless. Her husband, however, expressed his surprise, and Rhoda felt obliged to make some reply.

"I know I've been crabbed, this morning," she said; "but I can't help it."

"I rather think you haven't tried very much," responded Mr. Gray, in a conciliatory tone.

"Well, I suppose I haven't," she answered. "The fact is, I don't see what Uncle William is up here after."

"He told me he came to visit a niece of his, and see if the country air wouldn't benefit his health."

"He's welcome to all the air he can get, but I must look after my work. I suppose he'll want something to eat."

The dinner was one to tempt even a fastidious appetite. Small contribution could the garden make so early in the season, but what it gave was daintily prepared and delicately served. Rhoda fully sustained her reputation as a famous cook, and an opportunity speedily offered for testing her skill as nurse.

The third morning after the arrival of Mr. Dalton he was unable to leave his room, and

before night it was necessary to send for a physician. Obedient to the summons, Dr. Webb arrived, curious to see the man of whom he had heard so much; but this curiosity was soon lost in interest as he saw the condition of his patient.

"I'm afraid he'll have a run of fever in spite of me," he said, to Mr. Gray, as he came down from the chamber. "It will go hard with him at his time of life; but perhaps Rhoda and I can bring him through. At any rate, we'll try."

Rhoda immediately took her place in the sick-room, and for the next twenty-four hours devoted her whole time and strength to carrying out the doctor's prescriptions. Her uncle seemed hardly to realize his condition until the shadows began to lengthen on the second day of his illness. Rousing himself, he then asked Dr. Webb's opinion in regard to his probable recovery.

"I can't tell much about that yet," was the reply.

"I wish you to be frank with me," said the

sick man. "I have important business to transact before I leave this world."

"It wouldn't be strange if this should prove your last sickness; but, with such care as you have, there is good reason to hope that you will recover. You are hardly in a condition to transact business," added the doctor. "Everything depends upon your being quiet."

"A great deal depends upon my business. It must be done at all risks, and the sooner the better. Will you call Mr. Gray?" he asked, looking at his niece. "I think he will stay with me for a little while, and let you rest."

Mr. Gray obeyed the call, and Mr. Dalton, in few words, made known the business which demanded his attention. "I wish to leave the bulk of my property to my niece, Rhoda Smith, and I must make a will to that effect. If you will send for some competent person to draw up the instrument, you will oblige me. And let there be no unnecessary delay. I should like to have you remain, doctor," he added.

Judson Gray was sent to the village with a message to Esquire Weston, desiring his presence, without a moment's delay. The emphasis with which this was delivered quickened the usually slow movements of the lawyer, and, sooner than was anticipated, he had reached Mr. Gray's, ready for the business in hand.

No time was spent in formalities. Mr. Dalton was accustomed to act promptly, and before Esquire Weston had quite recovered from his astonishment at the terms of the will, it was duly executed, signed, and witnessed.

An expression of satisfaction escaped the lips of the sick man. "Now, will you please call my niece?" he asked of Mr. Gray.

Rhoda entered the room as the lawyer passed out, and her uncle desired her to open his trunk. "You will find the key in my dressing-case," he said.

She did as he desired.

"There are some articles of dress I brought for you. Some of them belonged to my wife

and daughters. I wish you to take them out now."

Rhoda was about to reply, but her uncle anticipated her. "I am too tired to talk. They are all yours. Take them."

She took them from the trunk carefully, as though fearing to touch the rich fabrics, — shawls, silks, and laces, more elegant than any she had before seen.

Such were the contents of the trunk, and all for one who had earned with her hands whatever she possessed. She hesitated to carry them from the room, until her uncle again desired her to accept them.

"Carry them away and let him rest," said Dr. Webb. "You are a poor nurse to trouble your patient in that way."

Even then, it was with reluctance she gathered up the articles, and took them away. With a bitter smile upon her lips, she deposited them in the drawers of an old bureau, belonging to her mother, and then returned to her post.

It needed but a glance at the invalid to

convince her that he had exerted himself quite beyond his strength. The flush had deepened on his cheek, and he moved his head restlessly, as though suffering severe pain. He motioned her to the bedside, and said, in a feeble voice, "I have neglected you too long, but I have tried to make amends for it. Think of me as charitably as you can."

"No more talking," interrupted Dr. Webb; "you've done too much of that already. This is bad business," he added aside, to Mr. Gray. "I must go now. If there should be any change for the worse, send for me at once. At present, the patient needs rest more than anything else."

While this was being said, Rhoda hastened downstairs and asked Judson to bring some water from the cold spring. This spring, which came bubbling up through the pure, white sand, was in a clump of evergreens, whose dense shade permitted no ray of sunlight to penetrate its retreat.

It was quite a distance from the house, but

no one considered it a task to go there. The task was in leaving so delightful a spot. Elsie, who had a troublesome habit of dreaming while wide awake, often lingered there so long that some other member of the family was sent to call her home. Judson, too, had a fancy for seating himself on a rustic bench near the spring, and forgetting the working world about him.

Aunt Rhoda had often complained of this; but she had no cause to complain that evening. Judson was back in the shortest possible time, and, a few minutes later, the cool water had relieved the burning thirst of the sick man. "That is like the water of the old well. I must drink from the old well, if —"

Here his mind wandered, and through the long night he talked, sometimes of his mother, sometimes of wife and children; but always incoherently. Mr. Gray and his niece watched beside him, bathing his fevered brow, and soothing his disquiet.

With the morning came Dr. Webb, who

shook his head gravely, and pronounced it a serious case. "The Daltons have strong constitutions," he said. "That is the only thing in his favor. But we shall see. We shall see; Rhoda's nursing is wonderful."

There was but little change during the next two weeks, except that the patient seemed gradually losing strength. The interest of the whole family was enlisted in his behalf, and not one but listened eagerly to every word concerning him, glad to render any possible service.

The decisive day came. The struggle between life and death would soon be over. Scarcely a footfall could be heard in the house. Voices were hushed, while the feeble pulse was numbered and the quivering breath noted.

"He will live," at length whispered the doctor, as a dewy moisture overspread the sick man's face, and the faint breathing grew more regular.

Each heart beat more freely. She, whose untiring care and devotion had, under God,

done much to insure this result, was almost overpowered by the welcome words. Through all she had maintained an outward composure, entirely at variance with the inward tumult of her thoughts ; but now her stoicism gave way. She went to her own room, and there shed such tears as ever bring a blessed relief to the overwrought feelings.

How she longed to sit down by Amy Hill, tell her the strange experience of the last weeks, and ask her sympathy !

No need was there of asking. Could she have seen this friend even for a moment, she would have learned that sympathy was given *unasked* ; while hourly prayer ascended that by all the discipline of life she might be made purer and better.

IV.

“ Sin can bind no chains so firmly,
But will yield, when grace divine,
Sought in prayer, with spirit, lowly,
Rules, and sanctifies the mind.”

MR. DALTON'S visit, illness, and history were themes of conversation throughout the quiet town in which the scenes of my story are laid.

Fabulous stories were told of his wealth. Esquire Weston was repeatedly questioned in regard to the object of his visit, and many confidently affirmed that Rhoda Smith would be a rich woman when her uncle died.

A few weeks before this, Mrs. Lunt and her niece had been objects of special interest. A small amount of property, left by her husband, had enabled Mrs. Lunt to purchase the house in which she lived with two acres of land adjoining.

With the exception of the fruit gathered from a few old apple-trees, this land was of little benefit to the owner. Those upon whom she had depended proved unreliable, and the ground had nearly run to waste.

Mr. Gray suggested to some of the men in that part of the town, that it would be only an act of neighborly kindness to see that this land was properly cultivated. Acting upon this suggestion, they had, early in the season, made preparation for planting, Mr. Felton engaging to have this done at the proper time.

By what seemed a mere accident, Dexter Rollins was the only man whose services he could command for this work; yet, being sober, he was a host in himself.

His employer drove down with him, carrying a large pail, filled with well-cooked food.

"You needn't have brought that," said Mrs. Lunt. "It's enough for our friends to do the work, without boarding themselves."

"That's some of my wife's business," was the reply.

Amy looked up with a smile, as she said ; —

“Your wife has a great deal of such business. She must have thought Mr. Rollins a wonderful eater, if that is his provision for one day.”

“I intended to have some one with him, but was disappointed. Wife sent some coffee. You know Rollins has been a terrible drunkard, and he isn’t more than half reformed yet. Some good, strong coffee will be a great help to him.”

Amy desired to hear more concerning the partial reformation of this man. Mr. Felton told her of the promise made to Aunt Lizzie. “Dec kept it faithfully too,” he said ; “but, at the end of the time, Lang got him into his bar-room again. It was all over then. He seemed possessed of a very demon, and abused his family shamefully. He was out of the shop until I lost all patience with him ; but for the sake of his wife and children, I persuaded him to come back and go to work. Since then, he has drunk by spells, though, on the whole, he is doing better than for sev-

eral years. If it wasn't for Lang, there'd be some hope for him."

"I wish it would do for me to talk to him," said Amy, her eyes filling with tears. "I pity his children so much, I long to do something to help them."

Well might she pity them. She had been a drunkard's child, and knew how terrible was such a lot. She shuddered, even now, as she thought of the blows inflicted by a father's hand, and the long days of suffering which followed.

"You may be the very one to help Dec Rollins," replied Mr. Felton, after a moment's consideration. "I hope you'll try, at any rate. You always seem to say the right things."

All the morning, Amy Hill thought of the man who worked within sight of her window. When the sun reached the noon mark, her aunt called him to dinner; but she had not yet decided how to address him upon the subject which lay so near her heart.

He, too, had been thinking, wishing that

he could eat his dinner under the shade of a tree. If some one was with him, he would not mind entering the house; but alone, he felt ill at ease. This was evident from his appearance.

He came in awkwardly, answering the greetings of Amy without raising his eyes to her face.

When seated at the table, Mrs. Lunt, as usual, invoked the blessing of God, asking that the food then eaten might strengthen them to do his service.

It seemed to Dexter Rollins that this petition was offered especially for him, and that, thereby, the food was consecrated.

He ate in silence, fearing lest, by some awkward movement, he might leave a stain upon the snowy cloth, or jostle the nicely arranged dishes. The eagerness with which he drank several cups of coffee showed that Mrs. Felton was right in supposing it would be just what he needed.

Mrs. Lunt tried to engage him in conversation, but he answered only in monosylla-

bles. They seemed to have no interests in common, and Amy, quite discouraged at her aunt's failure, began to think there would be no opportunity for her to speak a fitting word.

Dinner was over, and he was rising from the table, when she made some remark, expressing her thanks for the kindness they had received from their neighbors. "We are well cared for," she said. "This farming is a great help to Aunt Milly. You see I am only a burden, and she has everything to do herself. Last year, I was able to pick a few apples from the lower limbs of some of the trees near the house, and I hope to do as much this year."

"The children might pick your apples for you," replied Dexter Rollins. "Mine would be glad to, if they lived near."

"The children about here do pick some of them, and they do a great deal for us beside. I wish your children were nearer; I should like to see them. I've heard that they are very smart."

The man was not so brutalized as to hear this praise entirely unmoved. For the first time he looked directly at the speaker. "You must be quite proud of your children," she continued, with a smile. "Mary Burns, who taught your school last summer, says they are bright scholars. I hope you'll give them a chance to learn."

"I should like to," said the father, absently.

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Some parents seem not to care about the education of their children. I'm glad to find one who *does* care."

This was strange language to be addressed to one who often failed to provide necessary food for his children; but Amy Hill knew the weak points in human nature.

"I didn't have much chance for schooling, myself," answered her companion. "I was put to work."

"I know you lost your father when you were young; but I presume your mother did all she could for you."

"My mother tried to do for me," said the man, with a slight quiver in his voice.

"Your mother was a good woman, and mothers are the best friends we can ever have," replied Amy.

"I'm sure that I lost *my* best friend when my mother died. I didn't know it though, till she was gone. I used to think she was too strict; but I'd do anything to please her, if she'd come back, now."

"Our friends can never come back to us from the grave," said Amy, tenderly; "but we can show our affection for them by doing what they would approve if they were living. Your mother wished you to do right in all things," she added, slowly, and then waited for a reply.

"Yes, she did," was the answer. "I guess it's better she died. She'd only been miserable if she'd lived. I've been a bad man."

The speaker was nearly as much surprised at this confession as the listener. It was the spontaneous outburst of a heart that realized its guilt. In the presence of this pure,

earnest Christian he had involuntarily acknowledged his sin, and he looked to see her shrink from him with loathing.

Not thus had she learned Christ. "You cannot be all bad," she said.

"All bad," he repeated. "Yes, I am all bad. You would say so, too, if you knew."

"I know you have *one* very bad habit," replied his companion. "I wish you could be persuaded to give it up."

"I've a good many bad habits; but I suppose I know which you mean. I'm trying; but it's up-hill work."

"God will help you, if you ask him," murmured a gentle voice.

There was no reply to this, and Amy feared she had gone too far. "I hope you are not offended with me," she said, after a short pause.

"Not at all," he answered. "I know my duty, if I don't do it."

He took his hat and went out. It was wonderful what an amount of labor he accomplished that afternoon. The unrest of his

thoughts spurred him on, and, before the early supper hour, he had done a full day's work.

Mrs. Lunt, who had purposely absented herself during his conversation with Amy at noon, anxious not to appear unsocial, asked his advice in regard to the management of her garden. At home on this subject, and glad to give information, he spoke without embarrassment.

"You understand gardening so well you must have a good garden yourself," said Amy.

"I mean to have a good one this year," he answered.

"I suppose it's all planted long before this."

"It isn't even ploughed yet. I've been working for other folks instead of myself. I must see to it as soon as I get through here."

"It's poor economy to neglect the garden," responded Mrs. Lunt. "Men are a little apt to do so when they have a good deal of business on hand. They don't think so much about it as women do."

Only the evening before Dexter Rollins' wife had asked him about "making the garden," and he had replied with an oath. Now, he intended to have a good garden, and was impatient to set about it.

When he reached home he stood some time looking at the neglected piece of ground back of the house, occasionally driving a nail in the rickety fence. As he did this, he thought of what had been said to him that day. He had replenished his jug the day before, but, knowing where he was to work, had refrained from drinking in the morning, promising himself an extra allowance at night.

Night had come. His thirst was almost maddening. He had the means of gratifying it, yet he hesitated. He was to go to Mrs. Lunt's to-morrow, and perhaps Amy Hill would ask him if he had been able to resist temptation.

"*I can* do it," he said to himself. "*I will* do it," he said, a moment later.

During this time not one of his children went to him. As they caught the first sight

of him coming up the lane, they ran into the house, and now peeped shyly through the small windows.

It was growing dark, yet still the father paced the narrow flat of ground before the door. At length, his attention was arrested. Some one had been planting on his premises. Here were twelve hills. He took the trouble to count them. They might be of corn, or potatoes, but, whatever they were, each one was eloquent with a dumb reproach. They were guarded by miniature fences. His children must have done that. He entered the house, but the stillness within was more impressive than that without. No one welcomed him. His wife, only too glad to have him silent, did not even raise her eyes from her work. He wished she would say something, and give him an opportunity to tell her his plan about a garden. But she worked on, seemingly unconscious of his presence. The children crept noiselessly to bed.

"I see you've been planting," he said, after waiting in vain for his wife to speak.

"Yes," she replied, in a half-frightened tone. "I planted a few hills of potatoes."

"All right," answered her husband; "but I mean to have a good patch of potatoes. I'm going to have the land ploughed to-morrow or day after. I'll see if I can't raise something this year."

She wished to reply to this, but she could not control her voice to utter a word. She bent her head lower over the old garment she was repairing, and allowed herself to hope for better days.

The first rays of light the next morning found Dexter Rollins up, and ready for the long walk before him. He looked into the little cupboard. There was only a piece of corn bread. He wondered what his wife and children would have for dinner. There were a few potatoes in the cellar, but no meat. This was but poor provision for a family of five; not enough for one comfortable meal. At Mr. Felton's, he found breakfast ready, — a good, substantial breakfast, with plenty of coffee and cream as an accompaniment.

"Never starve a man if you want him to work well," was Mr. Felton's motto; and no one who sat at his table had reason to complain.

"You don't seem to eat well this morning, Rollins; what's the matter?" he asked. "Take another cup of coffee. I think it's worth drinking myself."

It was worth drinking, but, for some reason, Dexter Rollins did not relish it as usual. He was thinking of his home, of the poor and insufficient food there.

"Shall you get through down there to-day?" asked his employer.

"Yes, by noon, or a little after," was the reply. "Then I should like to go home and do something to my own land."

Mrs. Lunt found she must have dinner in good season, or Dexter Rollins would be gone. Just as he left the field it was ready, and, despite his assurance that he was not hungry, she insisted upon his coming in.

Amy spoke to him, but did not leave her chair. She was suffering more than usual.

With her customary patience, she made no complaint, yet she could not control the expression of her face. The white lips quivered with pain, and the thin hands were clasped convulsively.

The attention of her aunt was fixed upon her even while she sat at the table, and several times she went to her, sometimes expressing her sympathy in words, and sometimes with a caressing touch of the hand.

The pale face of Amy Hill touched the heart of the man who had cared so little for the sufferings of those bound to him by the closest ties. His eyes wandered to her constantly, and he could not forbear expressing his sympathy.

"It is hard," she said, in reply; "but God helps me. He never puts any more upon us than we can bear, if we look to him for strength. I have always suffered, and have learned where to go for help. You won't forget what I said to you yesterday," she added, still anxious to save him. "I shall pray for you. That's all I can do."

"I'll try to come down some time, and help you about your garden," he said to Mrs. Lunt, as he went out of the house.

He started for home, walking rapidly, that he might have the more time for work. Fortunately, he had an opportunity to ride part of the way, so that it was but little past noon when he stopped at Mr. Balch's to ask if he could have the oxen and plough.

"To be sure you can," was the reply. "I'm glad you want them. The ground round your house is worth cultivating. It will bear good crops if it's well taken care of. Been down to work for Mrs. Lunt, I heard. How is Amy?" he asked.

"She looks to me as though she was most gone," said Dexter Rollins. "I shouldn't think she could live but a short time."

"She has looked so for a good many of years," said his companion. "It seems hard that she should suffer as she does because her father was a brute."

"What did her father have to do about it?"

"I don't know as I ought to speak of it," said Mr. Balch, with some hesitation. "Her mother never liked to have anything said about it; but I suppose the truth is that Hill threw Amy out of the window when she was about four years old, and she never could walk after that without crutches. She wasn't a healthy child before; but that made her a cripple."

The listener's eyes flashed. "Hill deserved hanging for that," he said, impatiently.

"He was drunk when he did it," replied Mr. Balch. "Men do some terrible things when they are drunk. Drinking liquor isn't very safe business. Not very profitable, either, except to the man who sells it. But I am forgetting your business. When do you want the plough and oxen?"

"This afternoon, if you can spare them, and —"

"What is it? Anything else wanted?" he asked, seeing the hesitation of his neighbor.

"I'm ashamed to ask for anything else, but

I do want some pork ; if God spares my life I'll pay for it."

"You can have the pork, but mother gave Lizzie as much as she could carry home this morning. She came down after vinegar to eat on some greens your wife was cooking. Mother found out she hadn't any meat, so she sent some to her."

"Then I won't take any more, but I'll pay for it all the same."

"Well, you can take the oxen out of the barn, and, if you don't get done this afternoon, you can have them again to-morrow."

Dexter Rollins put the yoke upon the necks of the oxen, and the plough upon his own shoulder.

"Look at that man," said Mr. Balch to his mother, as he went out of the yard. "I supposed, of course, he would take the cart. There are but few men in town who would carry that plough ; but it's nothing for him. His strength is wonderful."

"The more sin in abusing it," replied the good woman.

The man did not feel burdened with the load upon his shoulder, but the load upon his heart well-nigh staggered him.

A few days before, little Mercy, his youngest child, had come up to him and laid her hand upon his knee. Something had irritated him, and, taking her by the shoulder, he threw her upon the floor, muttering something about brats always being in the way. Her mother caught her up and carried her to another room, where she hushed her cries.

He had entirely forgotten this circumstance until Luther Balch told him the story of Amy Hill. Now that he thought of it, he couldn't remember that he had seen Mercy since. He hastened on, almost dreading to meet her, yet impatient to know if she, too, was a cripple.

"Guess you've got a pretty heavy load," said Reuben Smith, as his neighbor was going by the field in which he was at work. He leaned upon his hoe preparatory to having a talk; but in this he was mistaken. There was no loitering for Dexter Rollins that afternoon.

Straight to his home he went and inquired for Mercy.

"I don't know where she is now," replied his wife. "She was here a minute ago."

"Mercy!" called her father, but no one answered. He called again with no better success.

Little Mercy was under the bed, in the farthest corner, and she had not the slightest idea of answering.

"Is anything the matter with her?" asked the father.

"Not as I know of," was the reply; "and, too, it seems as though she hadn't been quite so well for a day or two; she's wanted me to hold her a good deal."

"Where is she?" asked the father, now more anxious than before.

The mother's fears were roused, and she called the name of her child loudly. Still no response. "Perhaps she's gone after the other children. They went out a little while ago. I'll go and see."

They both left the house, and Mercy kept

still, too much frightened to move even had she been so disposed. After an unsuccessful search, the parents returned, Lizzie coming with them. She, understanding the habits of her sister, lifted the old quilt and revealed her hiding-place.

"Why, Mercy," said the father; "come right out of there; come," he repeated, coaxingly; but she made no movement. "What ails her?" he asked.

"She's afraid of you," said Lizzie, with sudden boldness. "She's afraid you'll strike her again."

Without another word he left the house, as thoroughly wretched as a man could well be. His first act was to dash the old brown jug against a stone. He stood looking at the fragments for a moment, and then went to his work. Two or three times he was upon the point of going in to look after Mercy; but the remembrance of her fright prevented him.

For supper they had what remained of the dinner. This was just such a supper as this

man usually relished ; but he found it impossible to eat that afternoon.

Little Mercy was missing ; not now under the bed, but tucked up behind a box in the children's room. Her father did not ask for her. He went again to his work, and it was quite dark when he drove the oxen back to their owner.

"All done?" asked Mr. Balch.

"Yes," was the reply ; "I just made out to finish."

"You've worked well ; I wonder how much you could do in the course of a year if you should really set about it."

"I'll show you if I live another year," he said, half to himself, and then left his neighbor to wonder what these words could mean.

Reuben Smith was hanging over the fence, waiting for him, when he went back. "Hallo, Dec ! wait a minute, can't you?" he exclaimed, as the man thus addressed was about to pass without noticing him.

"Can't stop," was the reply. "Got something to do at home."

"Let it wait ; there's no use working yourself to death."

"Better work to death than drink to death ; but I've made up my mind not to do either."

Seeing that there was danger of losing an opportunity to gossip, Reuben went out to the road, and there, pipe in hand, began to inquire how things were going on at Felton's.

"It's no use trying to keep me," said his companion. "I'm bound for home."

"Stop and have a drink ; I got my jug filled yesterday."

"And I broke mine to-day. So there's the difference between us."

"I hope there wasn't much in it," said Reuben, with unaffected concern.

"Pretty near full ; I hadn't had but one drink out of it."

"You ought to carry a steadier hand than that at your age. Lucky I've got some. Come, have a drink."

"I don't want any of your liquor ; I'm going home, and I may as well tell you about that jug. I broke it because I wanted to."

Having said this, Dexter Rollins strode up the hill.

"Guess he's got another temperance spell," muttered Reuben. "He'll get over it, pretty soon, though. Pity he broke the jug. He'll have to buy another."

Not a child to be seen in the home of Dexter Rollins. "What have you got to eat to-morrow?" he asked of his wife.

"Pork and potatoes, and I suppose the children can get some more greens."

"That all? No bread?"

"We had the last on the table to-night, and I've no meal nor flour."

He had a little change in his pocket. He gave it all to his wife, and asked her to go to Reuben Smith's in the morning, and get something to make bread. "Get some butter, too, if she'll trust you. I shall have some more money as soon as I get done planting, and go back to work."

Mercy Rollins looked first at her husband, and then at the money, quite as much astonished as Reuben Smith had been an hour before.

There was no explanation, but she rejoiced in so much good.

"I'm in no hurry for breakfast," said her husband, the next morning. "Perhaps you could go down to Smith's and get some flour."

Glad to oblige him, she went, and they had a better meal than had been seen in the house for a long time. Mercy came to the table, sitting as close as possible to her mother, and hardly looking up.

There was an era in Dexter Rollins' life. He spent a day at home without speaking a cross word, and the next morning reached the shop before any other workman had arrived. Mr. Felton had come down to look after some machinery, so there was an opportunity to say to him what he had been revolving in his own mind.

I will not detail the conversation. It was what might be expected between two such men upon such a subject. "Why have you come to this decision?" asked Mr. Felton, when all had been told. "What new influence has been brought to bear upon you?"

"Amy Hill set me to thinking," was the reply.

"Only waiting," — this was what sweet Amy Hill said of herself ; but, laid up on high, there was another record. No one else could have so influenced this hardened man ; and no brother had ever so moved the heart of Rhoda Smith.

Yet they were only two of the many for whom she prayed. When she heard of Mr. Dalton's sickness she prayed that his life might be spared, or, if appointed to die, that he might die the death of the Christian. Sincere was her thanksgiving when she heard from Dr. Webb that the dreaded crisis had passed.

"Rhoda is nearly worn out," he said, in reply to a question of her friend ; "but this sickness of her uncle's has been the greatest blessing of her life. She has done for him what no one else could do, and she will be a better woman for it."

She *was* a better woman. The old bitterness which had so warped and marred her

character was nearly gone. She had thought herself too strong to weep. Tears were now often in her eyes; but they were tears of joy; joy that, at last, she could see that "God knows best."

The days of her uncle's convalescence were pleasant days both to him and her. If a sense of duty had first moved him to seek her, it was a far different feeling that made him wish to keep her always with him. He missed her when she left him only for a few minutes.

Another had taken her place in the kitchen. "No more such work for you," said her uncle. "It is as much as you can do to look after me."

But for all that she did find time to relieve Mrs. Gray of some care, and keep a sharp lookout upon the doings of her successor.

The first day Mr. Dalton was able to go below stairs there was quite a jubilee in the house. The whole family were anxious to do honor to the occasion. Elsie spent half

the morning hunting for the largest strawberries to be found on the farm, and came back with her clothes in such a condition as would once have called forth one of Rhoda's severest lectures.

Now she was praised, her berries admired, and a promise given that the clothes should be made all right. "That's a good deal better than scolding," said Elsie to herself. "And I stayed half an hour at Cold Spring too. Dear me, I hope Aunt Rhoda won't go away!"

So they all hoped, but there was danger of such an event. Mr. Dalton began to talk of going home, and his niece was included in all his plans.

When he was first taken sick, he desired Mr. Gray to write to his partner and his house-keeper. He had received some letters, and these he had been able to answer, so that his friends knew of his improved health.

"You must not leave us until summer is gone," said Dr. Webb. "You are much better off here than you can be in the city, even in your own home."

Mr. and Mrs. Gray, too, urged him to remain, and, after considerable discussion, in which the words, "money" and "board" were frequently heard, it was settled that he should remain until September.

It was already the last of July, so there were less than two months to come of this visit, which was to have a powerful influence upon so many lives. Time plied the shuttle swiftly, mingling gray threads with golden, unmindful of sorrowing hearts and blighted hopes.

The old man grew stronger in the clear, healthy atmosphere, and younger in his intercourse with the children, with whom he was usually surrounded. There was a good deal of stateliness in his manner, when at home; but here, he met all cordially and heartily. There were a few men in town who remembered him as a boy. Some of these called upon him before he was able to go out, and others he afterwards visited.

He talked with Mr. Gray in regard to his sister, — Rhoda's mother, — and learned much concerning the last years of her life.

"Aunt Lizzie can tell you more about her," said his host. "She was one of your sister's confidential friends."

His conscience smote him more severely for the neglect of this sister, when he heard of the hardships she had endured.

"There was hardly another girl in town of Rhoda's capabilities," said Mr. Gray. "She was always at the head of her classes in school, although she could never get there in season. But she was laughed at and ridiculed till she lost all confidence in herself, and tried to slink away out of sight. People called her homely; and she was told of this so often by her cousins, that she thought it her fault, and I really believe she was ashamed to be seen."

"No decent person would ever treat a child like that," said her uncle, indignantly. Then, almost in the same breath, he added, "I ought not to condemn others when my own guilt is so much greater. This treatment must have had a great influence upon her. I wonder she was not ruined."

"She is not ruined," replied his companion ;
"but she is a very different woman from what she would have been under favorable circumstances."

"Of course she is," responded Mr. Dalton.
"I expect she wasn't very glad to see me when I came here this summer, and I certainly can't blame her. Indeed, I believe I like her all the better for it ; but she is a little too independent to suit me now."

"She learned her lesson of independence in a hard school, and she won't be likely to forget it very soon. It has made her too unyielding to be always agreeable ; but she has changed very much in that respect within the last six months. The children have felt the change. There she comes now," he added, pointing to Rhoda, who was coming from the field with Amos and Elsie.

Mr. Dalton rose and went to the window to get a better view of her. "She has a graceful figure, well-poised head, small feet, and magnificent hair," he said, enumerating her "fine points." "A woman thus dowered

ought to make herself handsome, even with a plainer face than Rhoda's. She must wear rich, warm colors. It isn't too late to make a lady of her yet."

From these remarks, my readers may be able to judge something of the character of this man. He had a great regard for appearances, and understood what was necessary to produce the best effect in dress and manners. He wished to take Rhoda to his home, but he also wished that she should do credit to her surroundings. It remained to be seen how much of his anticipations would prove true.

When his health was somewhat established, he spent considerable time in riding, looking after old places, and seeking new objects of interest. In these rides Rhoda often accompanied him; but she much preferred being left behind, when she could go into the kitchen or milk-room, and bring them back to their old order.

One of these opportunities having occurred, she was busily at work when Mrs. Gray came in, looking with satisfaction upon the im-

provement she had made. "Your uncle would hardly fancy your scrubbing at this rate," she said. "He calculates you'll live without work the rest of your life."

"Our calculations don't agree there," replied Rhoda. "I've worked too long to give it up now. He'll have to take somebody younger than I am, if he expects to make them over very much."

"You won't work in the kitchen when you get to the city. That wouldn't do at all."

"I've never said I'd go to the city yet. It's no place for me. I'd a great deal rather stay where I am. He wants me to wear the clothes he brought up; but I can't do it. Just think how I should look with them on!"

"I think you would look very well," replied Mrs. Gray. "You would soon get used to wearing them. You've had enough of hard work, and I, for one, should be very glad to see you better off."

"I am well enough off here," said Rhoda, giving the last touches to the shelf she was scouring. "Uncle William has no claims

upon me. I don't know as I'm indebted to him for anything only those clothes, and I'm ready to give them back any time. I believe I shall tell him that I can't go with him."

Mrs. Gray had no wish to reply to this. She knew Rhoda, perhaps, better than any one else, and fully agreed with her in many of her conclusions. Yet she would not interfere.

"When are we going to Cross Mountain?" asked Mr. Dalton of his niece, the following morning. "I must go there before I return home, and September is not far away. Suppose we go this afternoon."

It was many years since Rhoda had been there, and she did not care to go again. There were too many sad memories clustering around the spot. To drink from the old well would be no pleasure to her; but, to please her uncle, she consented to go with him.

Mr. Dalton believed that the old homestead rightfully belonged to his niece; but he could not prove this, even had it been worth

the trouble. "She will have enough without it," he said to Mr. Gray, when talking of the matter.

It was a delightful afternoon when the two started for Cross Mountain. Wherever they passed, people looked after them, hastening to doors and windows to get a good view. This amused Mr. Dalton, but annoyed Rhoda, and she was glad when they left the main road.

"This seems quite a climb to me now," said her uncle; "but when I was a boy, we didn't call it much of a hill. Father always kept a good road, and there were plenty of horses in the stable. I spent a good many happy days here."

Rhoda was silent, but her companion was too much engrossed to observe it. He left the carriage, and walked to the old well, and leaned against the ash-tree which still overshadowed it. "I've heard my mother say she planted this with her own hands," he said. "How long it is since then!"

The stones of the cellar and the charred

timbers around it were overgrown with tall grass. Everything here had changed since he went out from the shadow of the old roof-tree.

Yet the clouds seemed resting upon the far-off mountains just as they did when he first looked upon them, and, through an opening between two hills, he caught the glimpse of the same tiny lake that had nestled there threescore years before.

He was living in the past. Father, mother, brothers, and sisters were again around him. Again he heard their shouts of merry laughter, and echoed back their gladness.

All had been dear to him ; but Mira, the youngest of the flock, was his especial pet ; yet he left her to die among strangers. He had intended to provide for her comfort ; but he delayed until it was too late.

He forgot his niece, while she wandered away by herself, trying to force back the tears that trembled in her eyes. The effort was vain. The floods of emotion were too strong to be resisted.

When her uncle found her she was weeping as unrestrainedly as a child, with her face buried in her hands. Her grief seemed too sacred for intrusion, yet he could not leave her. He laid his hand upon her head, and uttered her name in a voice of tenderness to which she was all unused.

Had he only called her thus when she was a homeless child, how gladly she would have responded! Now, she tried to speak, but the great sobs choked her voice.

A bird cleft the air with noiseless wing, and rested on the tree in whose shade she was sitting. A wild gush of song gave notice of its presence, and the weeper raised her head to listen.

"I am sorry I asked you to come here," said Mr. Dalton. "Let me drink from the old well, and we will return. I did not intend to purchase pleasure at your expense."

There was a rude contrivance for drawing water, and Rhoda had provided pail and dipper. They lingered a little by the well, drank

of its sparkling contents, then turned their faces homeward.

Mr. Dalton was troubled by the barrier that existed between his niece and himself. He had not been conscious of it in his sickness, had not been troubled by it during his convalescence; but, as the days went by, it seemed to grow higher and broader. She was by his side that afternoon, yet far removed from him in sympathy and confidence.

In his present state this was intolerable, but he knew not how to surmount the unseen obstacle. He had told her that she was to be heir of his wealth; but she received the intelligence unmoved. Her regard could not be bought with money.

The first part of the drive was tedious to both, Rhoda being quite as unhappy as her uncle. "You haven't enjoyed this afternoon," he said, at length. "I ought to have known that the old place could not be to you what it is to me. You were too young when you left there to have many recollections of it."

"Uncle William, why didn't you help my

mother?" she asked, abruptly. "She said you would come and take us away from here ; but you didn't do it. After mother died, I hadn't anybody to take care of me. Why didn't you come?"

These were questions that had suggested themselves to William Dalton many times during the past few weeks, but he had been able to give no satisfactory replies. How could he now answer her who demanded a reason for his unnatural conduct.

"I cannot tell," he said, at length. "I was too much engaged in making money ; but I intended to come. I know that is no excuse for neglect of duty," he said, after a moment's pause. "I am deeply guilty, and I ask your forgiveness. I would ask your mother's too, if I could see her. I am an old man now, and you are all that is left to me. You cannot refuse to forgive me."

There was a moment's struggle, but the good in Rhoda Smith's nature triumphed, and she extended her hand in token of pardon.

"Now we will be friends," said the old

man, his face lighting up with pleasure. "I am glad you asked me that question. We shall understand each other better now. No words of yours could reproach me more bitterly than I have reproached myself. To speak of it has taken a great burden from my heart. You will not hate me now."

"I never hated you," Rhoda found voice to say; "but it seemed strange to me that none of mother's family ever came to see me."

"It is strange," was the reply; "and I have not yet seen her grave. We have time enough to drive there. Shall we go?" he asked.

"I should be very glad to go," said Rhoda. "It is a long time since I have been there."

The old burial-ground was a neglected-looking spot, but it commanded one of the finest views in town. The traveller would often pause by its gate to look upon the surrounding scenery, and perhaps read a lesson of mortality from the white stones that gleamed through the trees. Conspicuous among these were the two which marked the resting-places of Herbert Smith, and his wife Mira. These

had been placed there by her daughter; she having made it one of her first duties to pay this tribute of respect to her parents.

"Aged thirty-five years," read Mr. Dalton, from the head-stone. "She was no older than you when she died," he said to his niece. "I can see her now, as she looked when she bade me good-by. Little did I think it was for the last time."

The large tears rolled down his cheeks as he recalled this parting, and the sad events which followed.

Rhoda's heart was touched by this demonstration of grief, and involuntarily she moved nearer to her uncle. "I've always come here alone before," she murmured.

"We will come together now," was the broken reply. Then both were silent until the gentleman, with an effort, roused himself.

"Rhoda, you have never yet told me that you would make your home with me. Of course I expect it, but I should be glad to have your promise. I will do all I can to make you happy."

"I'm afraid I should disappoint you if I went, Uncle William. I've been brought up differently from my cousins. I'm odd and old-fashioned ; but I get along in my place here."

"And you will get along there," replied her uncle. "Only promise to go, and if you wish to come back I will try to be satisfied."

With much hesitation she gave the required promise. Her uncle stooped down to kiss her in a fatherly way. "That seals the compact," he exclaimed ; "and now it is time for us to go home."

Unused to caresses, Rhoda blushed like a girl at the first kiss of her lover ; but her uncle did not notice it.

"To-morrow we will go anywhere you wish to," he said, as they drove along. "Haven't you some friends you wish to visit?"

Rhoda had been wishing, all the summer, to visit Amy Hill ; but she had no intention of going there with her uncle. Aunt Lizzie Balch was another she must see.

"You needn't feel obliged to have my company," he said, at length.

"I suppose I ought to go to Cousin Reuben's," she replied, evasively. "You wouldn't want to see him or his wife. I guess I must take a week to visit in that neighborhood."

When they reached home Mrs. Gray was soon made acquainted with the fact that her friend had positively engaged to leave her.

"I trust you will be very happy," she replied to this communication.

"I don't expect to be happy," answered Rhoda. "I don't want to go; but I couldn't help making the promise, and now it's made it's got to be fulfilled."

With this conclusion, she was glad to set aside the subject, trusting to the future to present it in a more attractive light.

Two or three days after this, Judson Gray was waiting to drive with Aunt Rhoda to Reuben Smith's. How differently she looked from her who watched for the sound of the old bells six months before, and how differently she was regarded! To be sure she carried the same work-bag, knitting and sheath, but there was no great display of them.

Just before starting, her uncle gave her a handsome purse, which she was about to deposit with her other treasures, when he prevented her.

"You will find that purse well filled," he said. "I wish you to take it with you; you may need some money while you are gone."

"I have plenty with me besides that," she replied, but to save discussion she took the purse with its contents.

Mrs. Smith was standing at the door of her poor home, shading her eyes with her hand, when Judson Gray drove up. "It can't be," she said to herself; and the next moment she said aloud, "I declare, Reuben, there's Cousin Rhody. She's coming here, too, and there's nothing in the house fit to give her for dinner."

By this time Judson had driven to the door, and Samantha forgot her poverty in the real pleasure she felt at seeing this friend. "You've come to stop some, I hope," she said, cordially.

"I shall stop if you'll keep me," answered

Rhoda ; and here Reuben came forward, lazily.

"You've come to a poor place," he said. "We aint much used to rich folks. Guess you've got some up to your house," he added to Judson Gray.

"I suppose we have one," was the laughing reply ; "but we don't mind much about that."

"Seems to me you've grown pale this summer," said Mrs. Smith to her guest. "You've lost some of your flesh too."

"Perhaps so ; I've been shut up in the house most of the time, and that don't agree with me. Then, I've had a good deal to think of."

"Yes," interrupted Samantha, "I should think you had. I've been wanting to see you and ask you all about it."

"There isn't much to tell. I suppose Uncle William has made some provision for me, and that's all I know about it."

This by no means satisfied the curious woman, and she was about to ask some further questions when her husband came in,

and Rhoda commenced talking with him. Soon after, she went out of the room to make some preparation for dinner, but came back directly, to say that the cows were in the corn.

"Guess that fence's down again," said Reuben. "I meant to look after it yesterday, but didn't get time. Guess I'll mend it now."

"That's just the way everything goes," said the discouraged wife. "I've told him about that fence a good many times; but it's no use."

Once Rhoda would have scolded soundly about the shiftlessness of her cousin, and thus increased the unhappiness of his wife. Now she made some cheerful remark calculated to divert her attention. Then her thoughts reverted to the dinner. "I'm glad to see you," she said to her visitor; "but the fact is, I've nothing fit to give you for dinner. I'm poorly off."

"You needn't think anything about that," answered Rhoda; "I can eat what you can. Of course you've got pork and potatoes, and

butter and milk. We can make a dinner without any trouble. Just bring along what you've got. We might have some eggs with the pork."

"There aint an egg in the house," replied Samantha. "Reuben says the hens don't lay, and I haint been to the barn to see."

"It stands to reason that hens lay this time of year. I'll go to the barn myself and see what I can find."

Rhoda was disgusted with the first appearance of the barn, but she would not turn back. If Mistress Biddy had a nest there she was the very one to find it, as was proved by the generous supply of eggs she carried to the house.

"See here!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Smith, displaying her treasures. "You'd better look after the hens yourself. It don't do to trust men-folks for that. These will make quite an addition to our dinner. Now you set the table, and I'll see to the frying."

Rhoda's good nature put everything in the best possible light, and the dinner was

not so bad, after all. To be sure, there was no bread but that made of corn-meal, and there was no sugar for the tea; but what was lacking in variety was made up in quantity.

"Everybody else grows better off while we grow poorer," said Mrs. Smith to her visitor, when they sat down that afternoon for a confidential talk. "There's Dec Rollins, working every day as steady as any man in town, and they have everything they need in the house. I went up there yesterday, and Miss Rollins made me stay to supper. It was a good supper too, worth eating for anybody."

"I heard things were different there. I wonder how it came about."

"I guess Amy Hill had something to do about it. Any way, folks think so. I wish something could be done to change Reuben. We haint got but little left, and that's going as fast as it can. Lang was here, looking round, the other day, and soon afterwards Reuben said he shouldn't keep so many cows

much longer ; so I suppose there's a rum bill to be paid."

Just then, Reuben Smith came in from mending the fence, and said he was going to the village to get "some necessaries."

"Don't go on my account," responded Rhoda. "You can't afford to leave your work such a pleasant day as this. Samanthy and I'll go over to-morrow and get what's needed. That will give us a ride, and save your time too."

This was not at all to his taste, but, having no reasonable objection to offer, he felt obliged to yield the point. He did this, however, rather ungraciously, and managed to accomplish very little during the afternoon. From his restlessness, Rhoda judged that a visit to Lang's was included in his village business, although he said repeatedly that he was intending to get only tea, sugar, and flour, and they could hardly have supper and breakfast without.

The next morning, as early as might be, the two were ready for their ride. "You

can get the things charged," Reuben said to them. "I've got an account with Starkey."

This account was principally upon one side, but it was no larger for anything bought that morning. Rhoda ordered the groceries, and paid the bill, and then felt that she should be under no obligation to her cousin if she chose to remain there for a week.

Reuben Smith uttered his astonishment in a long, low whistle, when his wife told him of this, and showed him her stores. "It's a great help," she said; "but I'm ashamed to have her give them to us. I'm sorry we need it."

"So am I," was the quick reply. "I declare, things look pretty dark ahead."

"Why don't you carry a lantern, then?" asked a familiar voice.

"'Twould take something more than a lantern to light this track," he replied, with a forced laugh.

"Perhaps so. I don't know what track it is. I only heard you say something about its being dark ahead."

Mrs. Smith had feared that Rhoda would be so much elated at her good fortune that she would be quite above her humble cares and plans ; but she found herself entirely mistaken. Her visitor never gave her so much real sympathy and practical advice as in these few days. She helped her to repair old furniture and old garments, and in many ways contributed to her comfort. They visited together at Mr. Balch's, Rhoda going early in the morning, and Samantha following in the afternoon. Aunt Lizzie saw, with pleasure, the great change that had taken place in the dress and appearance of one in whom she was so much interested. "You have improved since I saw you," she said, when they were left alone.

"There was need of it," replied Rhoda, softly. "I was all wrong then, and thought I had the hardest time of anybody. I went to see Amy Hill after that."

"I heard about it," responded the old lady, with a happy smile. "She told me you'd been there, and left her some money. She

was very thankful for it too ; but I knew she'd do you more good than you could her. Her prayers are worth more than money."

"I know they are ; but I don't see how she can be so good when she suffers so much. I know I couldn't."

"You could if you placed your whole dependence on God ; and we always need his help. Prosperity sometimes tries us more than adversity. You may find that out by experience. They say you are going to live with your rich uncle."

"I'm going home with him, and if I'm contented, I shall stay."

"You'll find everything very different from what you've been used to."

"I know it, and it's no place for me. I told Uncle William so ; but he says he needs me, and I'm going to do the best I can."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, but you won't expect everything to go smooth."

Aunt Lizzie Balch had seen little of what is called society, but she had a large share of common sense, and a keen appreciation of

the proprieties of life under different circumstances. For this reason she was able to give Rhoda some much-needed advice, which perhaps no other would have presumed to offer. "If you were only a Christian, I should have no fears for you," said the old lady, at last.

"I wish I was one," replied Rhoda. "I've thought a good deal about it, since I was here last winter, and I've learned that God knows best."

"Then you've started in the right way. How is it about your uncle? Is he a Christian?"

Rhoda shook her head. "I don't think he is," she said, after a short silence. "He never says anything about it."

"Laying up treasures for this world and forgetting the world to come. That's what a great many are doing," said Aunt Lizzie. "I should like to see your Uncle William. I used to be some acquainted with him before he went away from here. I thought perhaps he'd come down here before now."

"He has talked about it, and I expect he has been waiting for me to come with him; but I wanted to see you alone first. I'll come with him before we go away."

The children claimed a share of this visit; the younger Mrs. Balch was at leisure after dinner, and when Mrs. Smith came the conversation became general.

"There's one more visit to make, and then I must begin to think of going back to Mrs. Gray's," said Rhoda, as she entered her cousin's house that evening. "I must see Amy Hill."

"You can have the horse any day," said Reuben, who was smoking his pipe in the chimney-corner. "Samanthy'll be glad to go with you; you'll find them pretty well off over there," he added, after a few more whiffs. "They'll have some grand crops this fall, and their apple-trees are so loaded they've had to prop up the limbs."

"Have you been down there?" asked Rhoda.

"Not lately. Dec Rollins told me about

it. He's worked down there some, and he's taken a mighty notion to Amy. He calls her an angel, and says she's saved him."

Thus working for the Master, in her own quiet way, this loving Christian gave far more of good than she received, and reaped a rich reward, even in her suffering.

V.

Out of shadow, into sunlight,
Out of darkness, into day,
So, oft, we tread, unheeding,
Our well-appointed way;
Nor dream that after sorrow
May dawn a glad to-morrow.

SEPTEMBER had come. Rhoda Smith had made all her visits, and, strange as it may seem, those in which her uncle joined her were the most pleasant.

He was as much interested in Amy Hill as she could desire, and left a substantial token of his interest. Aunt Lizzie he found to be a charming old lady, with whom he spent a pleasant hour in recalling events which had transpired more than half a century before.

The anticipated journey seemed formidable to one who, since she was a child, had hardly been beyond the limits of her own town; but

Mr. Dalton was in the best of spirits, and exerted himself for the entertainment of his niece, while her own independence and self-reliance helped her in supporting her new position.

Her outfit for the journey had been well selected. The favorite work-bag had yielded its place to a modern travelling-basket; and the old calash, which had so long served her for short excursions, was laid aside for a neat straw bonnet. The material and fitting of her dress were every way faultless, so that her companion had no reason to blush for her appearance.

The consciousness of being well dressed added to her self-respect, and made her feel somewhat at ease; but, as they drew towards the close of their journey, her anxiety returned. Many of her mother's relatives were living in the same city to which she was going, and the idea of meeting them was almost intolerable. She had endeared herself to her Uncle William during his sickness, until he looked upon her shortcomings with charity;

but those who had no regard for her would be quick to note defects.

"I don't know as I have told you that my house-keeper is an English woman, who lived with your mother when she was first married."

Rhoda roused herself from an unpleasant reverie as her uncle said this.

"Your grandmother took her when she was quite young and trained her to work," he continued. "She has been married several years, and her husband is my gardener."

"How long have they lived with you?" asked the listener.

"About ten years," was the reply. "You will find Mrs. Hawthorne a notable house-keeper. She takes the whole care of the house, and manages the servants; so you will not have any trouble with them."

Rhoda drew a long breath as she heard this, wondering how she could ever accommodate herself to house-keeper and servants.

Arrived in the city, it seemed to her the confusion of Babel was being repeated; but she had only to accept her uncle's care, and

trust herself to his guidance. Everything was so strange she hardly knew how she reached the house which he called home.

Mrs. Hawthorne was introduced to her, and, as a mark of special respect, herself led the way to the room which had been prepared for her. "If you please to have any change it shall be made," said the house-keeper, as she opened the door. "I ordered a fire on account of the chilliness. Will I send any-one to help you dress? The bell will ring for tea in half an hour."

"I shall need no help," answered Rhoda, with a weary sigh that went to the heart of the good, motherly woman who attended her.

"Can *I* do anything for you?" she asked. "You must be tired with your journey."

"I am very tired," was the reply, "and my head has ached all day. If uncle would excuse me, I'd rather not go down again this evening."

"I'll make that right with him, though he's mostly particular about his meals, and likes to have some one at the table with him.

I'll send you up a cup of tea and some toast, and, if I might be so bold, I'll come again myself, to see after you.

This offer being accepted, Rhoda was left alone to nurse her headache and homesickness as best she might. She glanced around the room, spacious, well-lighted, and richly furnished; yet she would gladly have exchanged it for her small bedroom at Mr. Gray's, with its uncarpeted floor, and low, vine-draped windows.

A large easy-chair stood where it could catch the cheerful glow from the fire in the grate. In this she seated herself and tried to rest; but her head throbbed too-painfully.

A rap on the door announced the arrival of tea and toast, and, at a word, the servant entered and placed the waiter upon a small table. "Will I put it by your chair?" she asked, quite as anxious to see the new-comer as to do her duty.

Rhoda, glad to be spared the trouble of rising, nodded an assent, and then dismissed the girl. The refreshment was too inviting

to be wholly neglected, but her appetite was quickly satisfied and the table pushed aside.

In the mean time Mrs. Hawthorne had excused the non-appearance of his niece to Mr. Dalton, who desired her to see that everything was provided for her comfort.

"She is poor Mira's child, you know," he said, in conclusion, sure that this consideration would have great weight with his house-keeper.

"Trust me for looking to her," said the woman to her husband a few minutes after. "If she's only half the lady her mother was, it will be a pleasure to do for her."

She found Rhoda still suffering when she went to her room. "Let me take down your hair and bathe your head," she said, as, suiting the action to the word, she unbound the heavy tresses. "No wonder your head aches," she added involuntarily, as she allowed them to drop from her hands.

Bathing relieved the pain, and the presence of one who knew something of her mother, may have done quite as much towards recon-

ciling Rhoda to her new situation. Mrs. Hawthorne did not leave her until assured that she felt much better, and was quite able to do for herself all that was necessary.

Still it was late when she slept, and, even then, she hardly seemed to rest. In the morning she was glad to find that it was raining heavily, the clouds being more in unison with her feelings than the sunshine would have been.

She had never risen before without having some object in prospect, something to be accomplished during the day ; but here she was expected to amuse herself without being employed. Even her sewing had all been done by a woman, hired for that purpose, before she left Mr. Gray's.

Fortunately, one was visiting in the town, who knew something of city fashions, and she had superintended the getting up of a wardrobe which Mr. Dalton pronounced passable. Nothing could have been more vexatious to one of Rhoda's habits than this remodelling of dress and manners, and it re-

quired the utmost stretch of Mrs. Gray's influence to prevent an open rebellion. She clung to the old dresses while she remained at the old home; but not one had she been allowed to bring with her. Mr. Dalton had proposed that she make a donation of the entire lot to Mrs. Lunt and Amy Hill.

"It's likely I'll want them myself yet," she said to Mattie and Elsie, who promised to take good care of whatever she left.

All this passed in review before her the first morning she found herself an inmate of her uncle's home.

A handsome morning dress was thrown over a chair. She doubted if she could wear it with comfort, but there was no alternative. Her uncle had pronounced it more becoming than any dress she had ever worn, and the mirror confirmed his words. The rich, warm color suited well her dark, pale face. For a moment she forgot the years that lay between her girlish dreams of beauty and the present. She forgot the cold, taunting words, the coarse, scant clothing, and the hard, menial labor.

There were light and love around her. She had a luxurious home, where every want was anticipated. This, at least, was no illusion; but it had come too late. The smile faded from her lips, and the old, bitter feeling came back to her heart.

It was well that she was interrupted in these musings. She had been unmindful of the lapse of time until the breakfast-bell sounded. With one last look in the mirror, for which look she chided herself the next moment, she went out into the hall and descended the stairs.

A servant waited to show her to the breakfast-room where she found her uncle, who rose to meet her, and conducted her to the head of the table. The greeting, a little stately, as was his wont, was yet sufficiently affectionate to reassure his niece, who was able to perform her duties quite to his acceptance.

He inquired with solicitude in regard to her health, expressing the hope that she had entirely recovered from the fatigue of her

journey. Contrary to his usual custom, he allowed the morning paper to remain unopened. When breakfast was over, for which Rhoda certainly had little appetite, he told her she must now consider herself at home.

"You will find books in the library, where you will be always welcome; and if you wish for anything that is not in the house, I trust you will not hesitate to tell me."

Books! She could remember the time when she had thought the possession of books would make her perfectly happy.

Her cousins had been fine musicians, and there was every provision for the gratification of a musical taste. They had been taught all elegant accomplishments, and everywhere were traces of their skill.

Her uncle invited her to the library. "This is where I spend most of my time when at home," he said. "You see it has been fitted up for the comfort of an old man," he added, pointing to a luxurious lounge which occupied a recess in the room. "The

parlors have been used but little since I was left alone. I told Mrs. Hawthorne to open them to-day. You will receive calls from our relatives, and they must be in readiness."

"I hope I shall not see them until I am a little used to my new position," said Rhoda.

"And would you rather not see your aunts and cousins for a few days?" asked her uncle.

"Very much rather," was the reply.

"It shall be as you please. I thought you might be lonely with no company but mine."

Later in the morning Mr. Dalton went to his place of business, and Rhoda tried to occupy herself in reading. Her mind soon wandered; she grew restless, and, closing the book, she set herself to explore the house. Entering one of the parlors, she found Mrs. Hawthorne engaged in superintending the arrangement of the room.

"We'll soon have it in order," she said, after a respectful greeting. "If you've a mind to look about the house, I'll be glad to show you," she added, as, with a parting in-

junction to the servant, she closed the door behind them.

Mrs. Hawthorne enjoyed this exhibition, which reflected so much credit upon her house-keeping, while Rhoda was quick to see and appreciate the excellence in this department. The last room entered seemed to Rhoda the most pleasant of all. It was in a wing of the main building, overlooking the garden, where choice fruit was ripening in the warmth of a September sun. An English ivy was trained across the windows and luxuriated in a sunny corner, where its tendrils twined around a light framework of canes.

"This is my room," said Mrs. Hawthorne, "and the ivy is a great pet of my husband's. It's a bit of the old country just here with us, and makes it seem like home. Will you please to sit down here?" she asked, after enlarging upon the beauty of this trailing plant, which to every English heart is eloquent of home and fatherland.

Rhoda accepted the proffered seat, a low

rocking-chair by the side of a table, on which were a work-basket and Bible. "I would like to stop if I shall not be in your way," she said.

"Never in my way," was the reply. "I'll always be glad to see you here."

Then the two chatted pleasantly until Mrs. Hawthorne was obliged to look after some household work, and Rhoda went to her chamber.

She knew she would be expected to dress for the late dinner with her uncle. "I'll never get used to it," she said to herself. "Nothing to do but dress and undress. I wonder if that is spending life profitably?"

Notwithstanding this, she was gratified with her reflection in the mirror, and smiled back to the well-dressed woman.

As my readers will have observed, Rhoda Smith had improved much in her use of language since we first made her acquaintance. Mr. Gray had said that she was a good scholar when in school; but her advantages had been limited, while hard work had

exhausted both her time and strength. After she left school she seldom opened a book, and, surrounded as she was by uneducated people, she acquired their rude, ungrammatical modes of expression.

But this never troubled her; indeed, she was hardly conscious of it until her first visit to Amy Hill, when every word from this gentle teacher seemed like music to her quickened sensibilities.

In trying to analyze this influence, she instinctively recognized the contrast between the different construction of sentences and use of words. Her thoughts once directed to the subject, she observed the conversation of individuals with a view to her own improvement, determined to be more careful of her words in future.

The teacher of the school in Mr. Gray's district that winter was one who laid great stress upon the proper use of language, and the children were constantly repeating at home the lessons they learned in school. Their grammars, too, were studied in the

evening, and the rules applied in such a manner as to be easily understood.

"I should like to study grammar with you," said Rhoda, when they were all gathered around the table.

"I might as well join the class too," said Mr. Gray. "There wasn't much attention paid to grammar when I was a boy."

The children were delighted at the prospect of having two grown-up scholars, and grammar lessons became quite an institution in the family. In connection with these, the dictionary was thoroughly studied, and woe be to the one who was caught tripping in pronunciation.

This, besides bringing Rhoda into sympathy with the children, was of great advantage to her personal appearance. She no longer used old-fashioned modes of expression, or, if she inadvertently let them slip, she was sure to be reminded of her fault. This she always received with good nature, and often with some amusing remark, which repaid the children for "watching Aunt Rhoda." When

her uncle came she made a still greater effort to "talk by rule," and had the satisfaction of feeling that she was not likely to shock his good taste by her unskilled speech.

Among those things which she had herself provided for her journey were a grammar and dictionary, packed in the very bottom of her trunk, to be brought out whenever occasion might require. She would need them both whenever she should write the letter that was to be read in Mr. Gray's family,

Elsie, who had a great curiosity in regard to the world outside her own observation, was anxious that this letter should contain a description of all the places and all the people she should see during her journey. "And be sure to tell us all about Uncle William's house," she added, in a whisper. "I wish I could see all the nice things there."

Pens, ink, and paper, with two books for consultation, lay before her, and she commenced the letter. The first few lines were

written, each stroke made with the greatest care, yet, by no means satisfying the writer, and she laid it aside, convinced that there were some things to be learned besides grammar and the dictionary.

Dinner with her uncle was more pleasant than she had anticipated, and the ceremony less irksome. He was happy in having her with him, and quite satisfied with her appearance. His business had been well managed during his absence, and, although he still mourned the loss of wife and children, his home seemed more cheerful than for many months.

He had thought often of his niece during the day, wondering how she had employed her time, and anxious that she should find everything pleasant. "I have seen some of our relatives, and they will call upon you in a few days," he said, when the servant had left the room, and he was sipping his wine. "I told them you were not quite well at present. Was that true?" he asked, smiling.

"It was true yesterday," she replied. "I am better to-day,—so well that I have commenced a letter to Mrs. Gray, which is to contain my entire experience since I left her house."

"Writing so soon!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "You will hardly do us justice now. Wait until you are better acquainted."

"I will try to do you justice," answered Rhoda. "It will take several days to write my letter, so I shall have ample time to become acquainted. You know writing is not one of my accomplishments."

"I know very little about that; but I can testify to some of your accomplishments, such as nursing and cooking, and there are times when these are worth more than all others. If I should have another illness like that of last summer, I should certainly think so."

Rhoda acknowledged this delicate compliment, which was really her due, and which, as was intended, gave her more self-confidence. She had once been of service to her

uncle, and the time might come when he would need her again.

When the hour came for retiring that night, she congratulated herself that one day was well over, while the next seemed less formidable. She was refreshed by a night of quiet sleep. The morning was one of sunshine; but clouds soon obscured the light, and to Rhoda the change seemed an emblem of her life. She had forgotten the preceding morning, when rain and darkness had given place to a brilliant noon.

She devoted considerable of the day to reading; studied a little, and took a more leisurely survey of the part of the house she was expected to occupy. Her uncle, whose improved health prompted to unusual activity, was away until the dinner hour.

"You will find something in the library, which I bought for you," he then said.

"What is it?" asked Rhoda, impulsively.

"Wait and see," was the laughing reply. "It is something I am sure you need, and which I hope you will like."

"There is nothing I need except work," answered Rhoda.

"Then your wants are all supplied. You have certainly had enough of work for one life."

"But, uncle, you can't expect me to be happy with nothing to do. I brought some yarn with me, but I am saving that to knit in the long winter evenings. It will never do for me to be so idle."

"Idleness will not injure you for a while, and I've no doubt when the winter evenings come you will find enough to occupy your time."

In talking and thinking of this, Rhoda forgot the present she was to receive until she entered the library. There the first object which met her sight was an elegant writing-desk.

"This is for you," said her uncle; "and I am very much mistaken if it is not just what you need. I ordered it to be well supplied with writing materials," he added.

Rhoda, quite dazzled by the costly gift,

expressed her thanks in a somewhat confused manner.

The next day Mrs. Hawthorne told her that the room Mrs. Dalton and her daughters had called "the retreat" was now in order. "I've freshened it up a bit," she said; "and you'll find it pleasant. Mistress used to sit there mostly when there was no company, and the young ladies were a good deal with her."

The room was fresh and bright as could be desired, too richly furnished to seem quite homelike to Rhoda; but she was fast becoming accustomed to rich furniture and luxurious surroundings.

She carried her writing-desk to this room, and spent considerable time in an effort to copy a specimen of fine penmanship, which, by some means, had found its way into the desk. Thus occupied, the hours flew swiftly, and that evening she gratified her uncle by telling him that he had supplied one of her greatest needs.

The days went by, and there was a great curiosity among the Dalton relatives to see

our heroine. William, being the eldest, and generally considered the most wealthy, was treated with much deference by the family, and since the death of his wife and children, there had been a good deal of speculation in regard to the probable disposition of his property.

No one of his relatives knew that he had any idea of seeking out his country niece. It was by little less than an accident that he learned of her existence. A gentleman of his acquaintance, in speaking of a proposed business tour, incidentally mentioned his native town as one of the places where he should stop.

"I wish you would inquire if there is a Rhoda Smith living there," said Mr. Dalton, and this name was written in the memorandum of his friend.

He asked the question when he reached the town, and made a note of the information he received; which information he transmitted to Mr. Dalton. Again he resolved, as he had often done before, to write and learn some-

thing more definite in regard to her; but again he delayed.

The death of his wife and children left him quite alone, and, his bereavement having quickened his sense of duty, he had sought his niece as I have before related.

Mrs. Hawthorne, who had been devotedly attached to Mira Dalton, was very desirous that her daughter should acquit herself creditably in the presence of her more favored relatives. Having lived in the family for so many years, and being a close observer of manners, she knew what points would seem to them of most importance.

When they made their first calls after Rhoda's arrival, she arranged a dainty lunch such as her former mistress would have ordered, and then assisted in the serving. Whatever could be done by a mere house-keeper *was* done by Mrs. Hawthorne.

Various were the comments made upon this visit, and many the criticisms bestowed upon "Cousin Rhoda."

"Not so awkward as I expected," said one.

"She has the family look," said another.

"And the family pride," added the third.

"She is well enough," remarked one of the cousins, who laid claim to superior intelligence; "but she is not entertaining in conversation."

As to face and figure, they were of the same opinion with Mr. Dalton, while they were unanimous in admiring her magnificent hair. Well and richly dressed, as she would be in that house, no one could call her dowdy or old-fashioned.

She, too, formed her own estimate of them while they were so freely discussing her merits.

In consideration of the deaths which had so recently transpired, the house was not opened to receive general company; but a few family friends called to make the acquaintance of Mr. Dalton's niece.

She, having no particular fancy for sight-seeing, took most of her out-door exercise in the garden, for the first few weeks; but, after that, her uncle insisted that she should ride,

and return the calls she had received. He sometimes accompanied her, but more often she went alone, until some of her cousins decided it would be best to show her more positive attention.

Then they were always ready to go with her, and often really burdened her with their presence. It was not possible that they could have many tastes in common; but this intercourse was, in one way, very advantageous to Rhoda, who always used her eyes and ears to the best advantage.

When the weather grew cooler, giving notice of winter's approach, her uncle reminded her that it would be necessary to make some additions to her wardrobe, and gave her a generous supply of money for that purpose. "You will do well to ask your Aunt Laura to accompany you in your shopping excursions," he said. "She has good taste in matters of dress."

"Aunt Laura" was quite too showy and haughty a woman to be a pleasant companion for Rhoda; and, although her mother's only

sister, she seemed almost to ignore the relationship. An opportunity, however, soon occurred, when it was convenient for this aunt, Mrs. Fulton, to make use of her brother's carriage, and Rhoda proposed that they do some shopping.

Mrs. Fulton, who, next to *buying* elegant goods, enjoyed *examining* them, graciously accepted the invitation of her niece, and led the way to the most fashionable stores, where the costliest fabrics were exhibited by obsequious clerks.

Rhoda was expected to have very little voice in this selection; and, in deference to her uncle, she allowed her companion to make most of the purchases. She spent, that morning, what would once have seemed to her a small fortune; but circumstances demanded conformity to the wishes of others.

To say that she was really happy in her present home would not be true. Her habits were too firmly established to be easily changed. Active life, with some future duty

beckoning her ever on, was necessary to her happiness.

Her thoughts often reverted to the friends she had left, and the long letters written and received served to keep each well advised of the other.

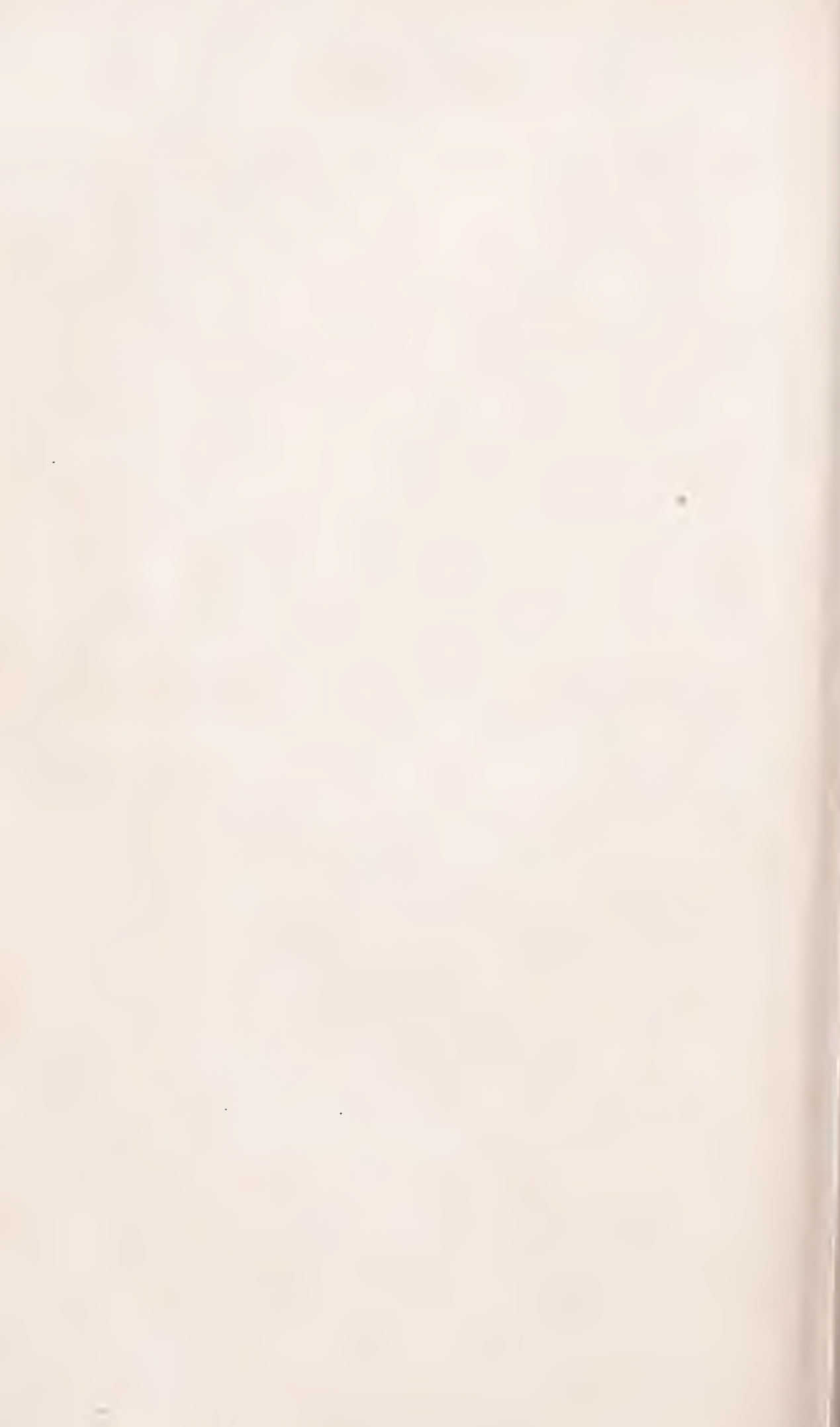
Mrs. Gray made a visit to Amy Hill for the purpose of giving Rhoda a particular account of her condition, which was far more favorable than could have been expected. She had never been so well as during the autumn months, and her heart was overflowing with gratitude. The promise of an abundant harvest had been more than realized.

"I am trying to write a letter to Rhoda Smith," said Amy. "It is so long since I have written at all that I make poor work of it; but I hope to finish it in a few days. I wish to tell her how well and how rich we are. We never expected to see such days as these. It is all because the Lord has cared for us," she added.

This letter was, at length, completed, and, in due time, reached its destination, where it



WRITING TO RHODA. Page 232.



was read with great interest. No letter had ever given Rhoda so much pleasure as this. She sympathized with the writer in her feelings of thankfulness, and appreciated the details of the harvest. The bounteous stores of nature's goods which had been lavished upon her friends gladdened her own heart.

Every one rejoiced at the result of "Widow Lunt's farming," and the last day's work was as freely given as the first. There was more than could be well housed upon the premises, and Mr. Felton took the surplus at a fair price.

Dexter Rollins, who had moved from the house where we first saw him, was now one of Mrs. Lunt's nearest neighbors, and most reliable friends. He was never so busy but he could find time to go there, and never so tired but he was ready to perform any labor that would add to the comfort of Amy Hill or her aunt.

His garden had been productive and his labor remunerative, so that he was able to make good provision for the winter. A year

before, his presence was considered a curse to any neighborhood; but he was gladly welcomed to his new home.

The "temperance spell," of which Reuben Smith had spoken with a sneer, was not yet ended, and there had been no necessity for replacing the brown jug. Little Mercy no longer concealed herself under the bed at his approach, but, on the contrary, sprang to his arms with a cry of joy, while he pressed her to his heart with a feeling of gratitude that his hand had not doomed her to a life of suffering.

But prosperity was not the universal rule in this country town. Lang still plied his trade of drunkard-making, and found patrons. Many a poor woman was obliged to submit to great privation that her husband might take his dram in the bar-room, and many a child went without needed food and clothing that her father might have the means of gratifying a hellish appetite.

There had been a temperance organization in the town, but it was languishing, and the

rum-seller had little positive opposition to encumber. There were those who passed him by on the other side whenever it was possible; yet, so long as the receipts of his business were not diminished, he was satisfied.

Dexter Rollins had spent a great deal of time and money in his house, and, whenever he absented himself for a few days, or weeks, he was sure to come back with increased means and appetite. When Lang heard from Reuben Smith that Dec had broken his jug and sworn off, he felt certain that his old customer would soon get tired of that way of living.

"He'll get dry enough, before long," he said, when speaking of him. "You may depend on that. We shan't lose his company."

"Don't be too sure," replied a man who held a half-emptied glass in his hand. "I saw him yesterday, and had a talk with him; it's my opinion he won't patronize this bar any more. He's a fool if he does. Felton says he's the best workman in town, and it's

a shame for him to pour his wages down his throat."

The occupants of the bar-room looked at the speaker in astonishment. He had been one of Dexter Rollins' boon companions, always ready for a drunken carouse, and ignoring every claim of wife and children.

"Seems to me that's queer talk for you," said one. "You're a pretty good match for Dec, yourself. If there's any fool about it, you haint much to brag of."

"Guess you're right there," he replied, setting down his glass. "As to that matter we're all fools."

Lang, who had at first considered this temperance speech amusing, was getting somewhat angry, as was manifest by his impatient drumming upon the counter. "Better drink your liquor," he said at length. "You'll feel better after that."

The man thus addressed showed no inclination to heed this advice, and the silence was getting oppressive, when one asked who had been talking to Rollins.

"Somebody who has a perfect right to talk," replied his old companion, Enos Grimes. "Somebody, too, who's good enough to have her words of some account."

"*Her* words," repeated the landlord, scornfully. "So it's a woman, is it? Women are generally at the bottom of most of the mischief in this world."

"You think so, don't you?" asked Grimes, fiercely. "Well, I don't," he added, without waiting for a reply. "Liquor's at the bottom of a good deal of mischief, and the men drink most of that."

"Well, Grimes, let that go, now. You haven't told us who talked to Dec. Perhaps you'd better go to her and get a sermon yourself."

"Yes, go," said Lang, whose patience was now entirely exhausted. "But you might as well let us know who the woman is, so we can go to her when we get ready to come under petticoat government."

Enos Grimes looked around the room with the air of one who was making an estimate

of those before him, saying, deliberately, "I wouldn't speak her name here. She is too good to be talked of by such men as we are." Then, turning to Lang, he added, "Guess I'll try Dec's plan a while. So, here goes;" and the glass was emptied of its contents in a way that injured no one but an unfortunate chicken, who was under the window at the time.

"Might have given that to me if you didn't want it yourself," exclaimed an old man, who, a short time before, had vainly urged Lang to give him credit for "just one glass."

"I *might*, but I didn't, and I'm glad of it," was the reply. "Just tell me how much of a charge you've got against me, and I'll pay it," he said to the landlord.

"Suppose you've got money enough for that?" asked a farmer, coming in at that moment.

"Guess so," answered Grimes. "I've been to work lately, and, if Lang makes an honest bill, I can pay it."

Lang was too shrewd to wish to make a

settlement at that time. "I can't stop to reckon up the account this morning," he said. "I haint posted my books for several days."

"I haint had anything here for two weeks, so the posting don't make any difference. Just walk up to the desk, and let's know how much I've got to pay for the cursed stuff. Now or never."

Thus urged, the landlord could no longer refuse, and, after turning the leaves of his ledger nervously for a short time, he told the amount of the bill.

"Guess that's a dollar more'n it ought to be; but I can afford to pay it, seeing it's the last."

"I declare, that's the first settlement I've had for a week," said Lang, changing his tactics. "I'll treat all round for that. Walk up, gentlemen, and call for just what you like," he added, clinking the money in his hand. "Come, Grimes, take a parting glass. You know we've always been good friends."

"Guess you think I've been talking bun-

combe just to see how 'twould sound," replied the man. "You're mistaken there. I've nothing special against you except your business; but I won't take that glass till the next time I call."

Lang was disappointed in the result of his plans. He had hoped that Grimes would join them in drinking, and thus give the lie to his words. Instead of this he walked out, leaving his glass untouched, while others drank the liquor with great relish.

"Made a fool of myself that time," thought the landlord. "But Grimes paid the bill; so that's one consolation."

On his way home, Grimes met Dexter Rollins, and the two had a long, earnest conversation. "How are things at home?" asked Rollins.

"Bad enough, I guess. The fact is, I don't know much about it. When I came away this morning, Mary Ann asked me to bring home some flour. She said there was a good deal needed; but the baby began to cry, and I didn't stop to hear any more. Our

supper was poor enough last night, and we didn't have much of a breakfast."

"You didn't get the flour?"

"No, I forgot it. Guess that's something of a lie," he added; "for I didn't mean to get it when she asked me. I was bound for a drunk."

"But you changed your mind."

"I should think I did. It looks like it, and I guess I'd better go back to Starkey's if I've got any money."

He emptied his pockets, and found enough to pay for a few groceries, so turned back with his friend.

Lang saw them coming down the village street, and went to the door to invite them in. Much to his chagrin, they passed by on the other side, never once looking towards the house where they had wasted so much precious time. Defeated again.

When the two men started for home, each carried as much as he could well manage. Starkey had given Enos Grimes as much credit as he desired; and his wife was as

much astonished as any poor woman could be, who had expected blows, yet received food and kind words.

"That is good news," said Aunt Lizzie Balch, when her son told her of Enos Grimes' resolution to lead a better life.

"It is good news, and I trust he'll persevere," was the reply. "Dec Rollins has him under his eye, and will keep him straight if anybody can. I wish somebody could start Reuben Smith on another track. He drinks and smokes, and smokes and drinks, from one week's end to another, until he's completely stupefied with rum and tobacco."

"There don't seem to be much hope for him, unless something wakes him up, and I don't know but 'twould take a thunderbolt to do that."

"Pretty near that, mother," replied Mr. Balch. "If he was stripped of everything, without so much as a shelter for his head, he might begin to think."

Not a thunderbolt from heaven, but his own carelessness, left him in this position.

One night, in the early part of December, he came from the village at a late hour, in his usual drowsy state. Just before leaving Lang's he had refilled his pipe, and, of course, smoked until ready for bed.

About one o'clock, he was roused from sleep by his wife's cry of fire. Even then he stopped to rub his eyes before he fairly opened them; but this was his only delay. He was, for once, fully awake. He rushed out, shouting for help at the top of his voice.

The barn was enveloped in flames, and a strong wind blowing towards the house. Already some burning brands had fallen upon the roof, and the dry shingles were beginning to crackle and blaze. At sight of this, the voice of Reuben Smith again rang out upon the night air, and this time it was heard by Lizzie Balch, who, springing from her bed in fright, roused every member of the family by her shrill cries.

While her husband was calling on others for help, Mrs. Smith was trying to help herself. Partially dressing, she began collect-

ing what was most valuable in the house. Bedding and clothing were brought from the low chamber, every corner of which was lighted, and by the time Reuben came in, a huge bundle was ready, which must be carried beyond reach of the fire.

"Be quick about it," she said. "We can't stay here long."

Mr. Balch, and a young man working for him, made all possible haste to the scene of disaster, and reached there in time to assist in saving some of the contents of the house. There had been no thought of trying to save the house, and probably such an effort would have been useless.

"Without a shelter for his head." This was the condition of Reuben Smith. Only a heap of blackened ruins marked the spot where his home had been. In the cold, gray morning, surrounded by many of his townsmen, he looked upon the scene of desolation.

There was much questioning in regard to the origin of the fire, and many surmises as to how it *might* have happened. "Were

you in the barn last night, after you came home?" asked one and another.

The reply to this was invariably in the negative, and Reuben Smith told the truth; but had he been answering upon oath in regard to the cause of the fire, he would have felt obliged to acknowledge that, although not in the barn, he was in the horse-shed adjoining the barn.

While there, by some accident, his pipe was knocked from his mouth. Glad that it was not broken, he never thought of looking to see if some spark had fallen into the straw, but replaced his pipe and went to the house. .

"Were the horse and cow burned in the barn?" asked one who came galloping up after every one else had discussed the whole matter.

"No, indeed. They wa'n't near the barn," was the reply.

"Where then?" asked the astonished questioner.

"Down in the lot, safe and sound as ever."

"What! turned out at this time of year?"

"To be sure. That is of a piece with all Smith's management, and they're about as well off there as they would have been in the barn. There's an old sheep-shed down by the great rock, and a hay-stack not far off, so they'd get enough to eat."

"Lost your pipe, too, haint you, Reuben?" said one disposed to be facetious.

"Small loss," responded another. "There's plenty more to be had, and they don't cost much either."

What had been saved was strewed on the sides of the road for some distance, — baskets, boxes, and bundles mingled in strange confusion. Mrs. Smith, after vainly endeavoring to improve their arrangement, was persuaded to go home with Mrs. Balch.

Aunt Lizzie endeavored to comfort her in her misfortune, but she was answered only with tears and lamentations.

"I'm afraid you don't feel right about this," said the old lady, kindly. "You ought to be thankful that your lives are spared.

You'll have enough to keep house with. You needn't worry about that."

"I've no house to keep," exclaimed the homeless woman; "but that's a small part of my trouble. The fire haint made much difference, — only taken it a little sooner, and it might as well come now as ever."

No direct reply was made to this. Everybody knew that Reuben Smith was deeply in debt, and dependent upon the mercy of his creditors. Many of these had met that morning, drawn together by the unusual occurrence, and Luther Balch, always acting promptly and decidedly, spoke to them in behalf of the unfortunate man.

"We must waive our claims upon him for the present, and give him a fair chance to recover from this," he said.

"It's no use to do anything for him," answered a hard-faced man, whose only virtue was that of temperance. "He'll drink up everything he can get, and I want my money for my own use. I've waited for it long enough."

"How much does he owe you?" asked an old man at his side.

The sum was so insignificant that the debtor was ashamed to state it, and left for home.

"We must do more than give him a *chance*," said the old man. "We must give him substantial *aid*, and I move that Luther Balch take the matter in hand and see what is best. It's no time now to talk about bad habits and shiftlessness."

This suggestion was received with favor, all present pledging themselves to aid in the good work.

Reuben Smith had been to look after his horse and cow, thus giving an opportunity for this conversation. When he returned, the men began to disperse, and he was soon left with only Mr. Balch and Uncle Turner, the old man who had spoken in his behalf.

"Well, Reuben, this is one of the way-marks in your life," he said. "It seems some like a stopping-place too. You won't be likely to forget it very soon."

"I shan't ever forget it," was the reply.

"Likely not. I know it's hard; but you must keep up good courage, and go to work, determined to make up your loss. We are all ready to help you; but we don't want to pay any rum bills."

This last was said in a tone little above a whisper, and in the same low voice was asked the question, "Don't you think it's time now for you to stop drinking?"

"Guess 'tis," was the reply. "Guess 'twas a good while ago, and I knew it, but I didn't stop."

"Will you stop now?" asked his friend.

"Guess I'd better not make many promises," answered Reuben, "and then I shan't break any."

"We'll go down and have some breakfast, now," said Mr. Balch, as Uncle Turner got into his wagon to drive away. "I feel the need of some myself, and I rather think you do."

His companion protested that he had no wish for breakfast, but he would not accept

the excuse. They walked slowly away, Reuben casting many a lingering look behind him.

Breakfast was waiting, and the whole family welcomed him. He was urged to eat; but the food choked him. "*You must eat,*" said Aunt Lizzie. "There's a great deal to be done and thought of to-day; you must both eat. Be thankful for the present, and trust for the future. There's always a way out of trouble if we do the best we can."

"Mother is right," said her son. "There's a way out of this trouble, and I have faith to believe we shall find it."

"I wish I had faith," responded Mrs. Smith, brokenly. "It might give me a little courage."

Reuben said nothing; but he closed his lips firmly, and his eyes had a wide-awake look, very different from their usual sleepy expression.

Breakfast over, then came family worship, which here was never omitted. After this there was a consultation in regard to what

was best to do. Mr. Balch offered his guests a home until they could find some permanent accommodation; but Reuben thought they had better move directly into the old house Dexter Rollins had left.

"It's a poor place, I know," he said. "But it's better than none, and convenient to my work. Do you feel willing to go there?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"Anywhere," she replied. "It don't make any difference to me, only I should like to get my things together somewhere. There aint many of them, but I want to keep what there are left."

"Then, if that's the thing to be done, we'll move your goods right up this morning, and do what we can towards making the house comfortable," said Mr. Balch, cheerfully.

"Guess we ought to see the owner about it first," suggested Reuben.

"No need of that," responded his host. "I'll take the responsibility. He'll be glad enough to have a tenant."

"I'd better go up now," said Mrs. Smith, rising.

"Not till I am ready to go with you," replied Mrs. Balch.

"You can go any time, mother," said Mary. "Lizzie and I can do all the work, if grandmother will only oversee it a little."

"Yes, you can go," added grandmother. "That is, if Samantha thinks *she* must go. Seems to me she'd better wait a while, but I suppose she feels anxious to find out what there is left."

George was soon ready with the horse and wagon, and the two women started for the old house. As they passed the smouldering ruins Mrs. Smith began to weep, but George called her attention to a pig that seemed to be exploring the premises. "Is that your pig?" he asked.

"It looks like it," she replied. "It must be," she added, after a moment's scrutiny. "I supposed that had gone with everything else."

"You're so much better off than you expected," said Mrs. Balch. "That will be quite an addition to your living. If Rhoda was here, she'd call it a good sign."

The hens were next observed, scratching for a living as usual.

"Your live stock have escaped. That's fortunate," said Mrs. Balch, anxious to present the bright side of the picture. When they reached their destination, she saw a bright side, even there. The house was clean with the exception of the dust collected since it had been vacated.

There was some dry wood near the door, with which a blazing fire was soon made, and when the first load of goods had been arranged it really seemed quite cheerful.

There was busy work that morning, and, before any one had thought of dinner, the horn sounded. "That means dinner," said Mr. Balch. "We'll go down now and leave George to watch the fire. I suppose you can wait," he added to the boy, who could always do whatever his father desired. "Perhaps

I'll send up Lizzie if you'd like her company."

Lizzie was very glad to go; so taking a basket, containing dinner enough for herself and for her brother, she made her way up the hill. Stopping to look at the ruins, she forgot her errand until a shrill whistle was heard.

George had seen her from the window, and, although willing to wait for his dinner, if necessary, he thought Lizzie could afford to postpone her sight-seeing a while.

"There, I'm all out of breath," she exclaimed, when she gave him the basket. "I know you must be hungry, but I didn't think anything about it when I got to the fire. Isn't it dreadful?"

"What, the fire or the dinner?" asked her brother, laughing.

"The fire, to be sure. I guess you'll think the dinner is pretty good. Mary and I cooked it."

"It is good," he replied, when he had tested its merits. "But did you leave any at

home? You must have brought away a large share of it."

"You'd better ask the folks about that, when they come back," said Lizzie, with a significant toss of her head.

An abundance of good things crowned the table at home, and this time they were appreciated. Mr. and Mrs. Smith ate heartily, praising the skill of the young girls.

Reuben was very impatient to go back to his work so soon as dinner was over; but Aunt Lizzie insisted that he should rest a while.

"I am going up myself, pretty soon, and see what can be done with that apology for a barn," said Mr. Balch. "Your horse and cow must have some kind of shelter."

"I've been thinking about them," answered their owner; "and —"

"There's Lang," interrupted Aunt Lizzie, as some one drove to the door.

"Guess it's me he's after, said Reuben Smith, as his host went out to meet the rum-

seller. "Your folks don't have much to do with him."

"No," replied the old lady. "Luther has a poor opinion of him and his business."

Lang had called to see Mr. Smith, as he informed Mr. Balch. He had a little business that way, and thought he'd like to see his old friend, after his misfortune. "I suppose we'd better all take hold and give him a lift."

"I hope everybody will feel inclined to help him," was the reply. "His creditors that I have seen are willing to wait for what he owes them, and now, if he'll let drink alone, he may get along."

The rumseller scowled at this, and again asked for Mr. Smith, when Mr. Balch went into the house.

"Do you owe that man?" he asked his guest.

"Yes," was the reply. "Pretty deep, too, I guess."

"He'll probably call for his pay right off."

"Guess he will. He aint one to wait."

"Well, don't make any promises this morning."

"Not one to that man," answered Reuben, emphatically. "I've made enough to him."

Mr. Lang's interview with his old friend was short, and the result soon known. He had hardly turned his horse when his debtor was in the house.

"Short settlement that," said Mr. Balch.

"Guess 'twill be a long one before we get through. Lang's worse than I thought he was."

"I always told you he was a bad man. What has happened now to open your eyes?"

"Guess he don't want anything said about it," replied Reuben. "It won't do any hurt to tell of it here, and I don't care if it does. I never mean to ask any more favors of him."

"Did you ever get any favors from him?" asked Aunt Lizzie.

"He calls them so," answered the excited man. "He wants me to pay him the first of January. Says he'll knock off ten dollars

from the bill if I will, and subscribe something handsome for me besides."

"What did you tell him?" asked his wife.

"Told him I hadn't any money; but he said I should have some given to me, and then I could pay up. Guess he'll wait a while. He's had a good deal of my money first and last. He didn't feel right when he went away, and he'll make me trouble yet."

"He's made trouble enough already," said Samantha. "I wish he'd go where you couldn't see him again."

"So that's his game, is it?" exclaimed Mr. Balch, after some consideration. "Now, if you'll follow my advice, I'll guarantee that you won't have any trouble with Lang; and he'll wait for his pay just as long as you say."

"I'll do it," replied Reuben. "If there's any way to get rid of him, I should like to know what 'tis."

The afternoon was too short for all that was necessary to be done, but night found Mr. and Mrs. Smith settled in their new home. By the generosity of their neighbors

their pantry was filled to overflowing, and in the cellar was a good supply of vegetables.

No rum, no tobacco ; and if Reuben Smith followed the advice of his best friends, these would never again find a place in his home.

VI.

“Through all our land the cry goes up
From humble cot and lordly home;
Death lurks within the poisoned cup,
And he who drinks shall seal his doom.”

THE New Year had come, and with it work for Rhoda Smith. Her uncle was smitten down with paralysis, and lay, for several days, in a half-unconscious state, seeming to recognize no one but his niece. When she was beside him he rested quietly, and, without a thought for herself, she watched over him day and night. When first he could express his wants by signs she alone understood him; and, when able to speak, it was her quick ear which caught the broken words.

“Master would die without her,” said Mrs. Hawthorne to her husband. “She’s more to him now than his own children would have been. She knows what to do better than fine ladies.”

"I hope she'll be well paid for it," was the reply. "It's not easy to watch and serve as she does. I mind she's getting thin."

Others beside the gardener could see this. The physician who attended Mr. Dalton remonstrated with her. "Your uncle will always need care," he said. "If you break down now, you will be obliged to leave him entirely."

Robert Dalton, who lived in the same part of the city, called often to see his brother, and, finding her always at her post, inquired when she slept.

"When my patient sleeps," was the reply.

Mrs. Fulton, having an eye to the property of her childless brother, sent each day to inquire for his health, besides making frequent calls.

These calls, however, always troubled him. She came rustling into the room, elaborately dressed, and overwhelming him with her protestations of regard, while she never offered to sit by him, even for an hour. Fortunately,

her visits were short, to the relief of Rhoda, as well as her uncle.

"She isn't much like your mother," he said one day to his niece. "Mira thought more of others than herself, but Laura cares for dress and show."

Not the least of Rhoda's tasks was reading aloud the daily paper, her uncle being unable to read for himself. When she had finished this, she was often entirely exhausted; and, at length Mrs. Hawthorne ventured to tell "the master," as she called Mr. Dalton. "I hope you'll not think me too bold, sir," she said, "but I've seen it a long time, and I'm fretted for fear you'll lose her with the rest. You might find a lad who would read to you. Perhaps, too, a servant could do some of the things Miss Smith has taken on herself," she added, wishing to present the whole subject.

"I am very glad you have spoken of this; I ought to have seen it myself, but I didn't. The next time Mr. Trull comes in I'll ask him if he knows of any one I can get for a reader.

I suppose there are servants enough in the house."

"Sure there are, and glad to wait upon you. There's a young lad, too, comes in sometimes of an evening and reads to me. I'm thinking his mother would take it kind of you if you would give him a trial. She is a widow and has only her hands for support."

"Send him in to-morrow, and if he suits me I'll engage him."

"I've been very selfish," he said to Rhoda, when she came in soon after. "Mrs. Hawthorne has just told me that you are not well. I ought to have known I was asking too much of you. We are going to have you rest now, and let some one else read to me."

Rhoda could not say that this was unnecessary. She found her health failing under the long-continued draft upon her strength, and was glad that the considerate kindness of Mrs. Hawthorne had spared her the task of communicating this to her uncle.

"You are nearly sick, Rhoda," he said, questioningly, after her somewhat evasive reply to his first remarks. "Order the horses and go over to Mrs. Fulton's; you have been confined too closely."

"I should prefer not to go out to-day. My head is aching, and sleep will be the best medicine for that."

"Then go and sleep; but first, let me see how you look." Rhoda knelt by the couch on which her uncle was lying, while, with his dimmed eyes, he scanned her face. "You look sick, child," he exclaimed. "It is time Mrs. Hawthorne spoke to me. Please ring the bell."

"I wish to see Mrs. Hawthorne," he said to the servant, who answered the bell.

The house-keeper appeared directly. "Here is some one who needs the best care you can give her," said Mr. Dalton, pointing to his niece.

"She shall have it," was the prompt reply. "I've seen that all along."

"Send for Dr. Payne, if necessary."

"We'll try rest and good nursing first," said Mrs. Hawthorne.

"I need nothing but rest. I am only tired, and shall soon be well as ever." With this assurance, Rhoda left the room; but her uncle looked after her anxiously, and in half an hour sent a servant to ask if she was better.

"Master's not in his best judgment to ask so soon as this," replied Mrs. Hawthorne. "However, tell him she's resting."

Rhoda remained in her room several days, and frequent messages from her uncle forbade all anxiety on his account. The lad who had been recommended to him as reader gave entire satisfaction.

"Master's quite taken with him," Mrs. Hawthorne said to Rhoda; "and I'm sure you'll like him yourself. James Burton's a kind, honest lad, and a great comfort to his mother, who has had trouble enough in her day."

"What trouble?" was asked.

"The trouble many a poor woman has.

Her husband took to drinking and abused her. He died a year ago, and I'm sure she can't mourn for him. She's better off since.'

The listener wondered if this curse of drunkenness was universal, and if everywhere men squandered their wages, while women wept and starved.

"It's often so," said her companion, in answer to a remark expressive of this feeling. "But it's not always that starving comes with drinking. There's many a wretched home where there's plenty. I've seen it often. The rich suffer as well as the poor. Thank God, my Thomas signed the pledge before we were married! I'd not trust him without."

"Then he doesn't drink wine."

"Never. He'd break his pledge if he did. He tried to have young master give it up.' Here the speaker paused abruptly, her face flushing scarlet.

"Who is Robert that Uncle William talks about?" asked Rhoda. "Is it Uncle Robert?"

"I never hear him speak of any other Robert," replied the house-keeper.

Her companion was looking at her sharply as she said this, and immediately proposed another question. "Had he ever a son? I think so," she added.

While Mr. Dalton was sick at Mr. Gray's, in his delirium, he often talked of Robert; sometimes coupling his name with endearing epithets, and sometimes with reproaches. During his sickness in the winter, this same name was often repeated, and in a way which roused the curiosity of his niece.

She at first supposed her Uncle Robert was the person intended, but within a few days she had thought otherwise. Not considering it improper to ask one who had been so long in the family, the manner of Mrs. Hawthorne satisfied her that her suspicions were correct.

Rhoda was soon left alone, and she then occupied herself in recalling the circumstances which had led her to suspect that her Uncle William had once been the father of a son Robert.

If this were true, why was his name never mentioned as were those of the daughters? Was he dead, or was he living, estranged from his family? These and many other questions were suggested.

She now remembered that, in the early part of their acquaintance, her Aunt Laura had made some remarks that were entirely unintelligible, and, finding she was not understood, immediately directed attention to an object of absorbing interest.

The family pride would forbid any revelation which might detract from its honor. The Daltons claimed wealth and position as their inalienable right. Mira had lost both through the dissipation of her husband, and her existence was henceforth ignored.

Rhoda no longer wondered that she had been allowed to remain unrecognized by those upon whom she had a natural claim. If there was a dark page in the history of William Dalton's life, it was carefully concealed, and hers was not the hand to lift the veil.

He was broken with age and grief. This thought ever stayed the tide of feeling which the memory of early years awakened. She was not faultless, that she should condemn others. There had been deeper wrongs and sadder lives than hers. Again and again she repeated Aunt Lizzie's words, "God knows best."

Her cousins said there had been a wonderful improvement in her manners since she came to the city, and mingled with refined, cultivated people. This could not but produce a change; yet the heart lessons she had learned in secret, with an open Bible before her, had far more influence. Humiliation and repentance for past ingratitude were more potent than rules of etiquette.

In the early part of her uncle's illness she had received a letter, giving particulars of the fire which had destroyed the house of Reuben Smith. "I'm glad of it," she said to herself. "He needed something to give him a shock, and if this don't set him to thinking nothing will. If it wasn't for his wife, I

should hope the people would leave him to make up his own loss."

A second letter informed her that he was hard at work, getting out lumber for a new house, and everybody was glad to help him. "He has settled with Lang, and says there will never be another such bill against him," wrote Mrs. Gray. "His wife rejoices with fear and trembling."

In her days of rest Rhoda had time to think of them, and give expression to her sympathy. After all, it was no worse for Reuben Smith to drink cheap liquors, than for another and wealthier cousin to sip costly wines. He would have preferred choice cigars to a pipe and coarse tobacco; but, these being beyond his means, was that any reason why he should not solace himself with the substitute?

There was always wine upon the dinner-table when her uncle was present; and, in most of the houses where she had visited, it was considered indispensable. This surely was not temperance.

The evening after she had startled Mrs.

Hawthorne by her abrupt inquiry, this woman rapped at her door. "I have come to answer the question you asked me," she said. 'I wouldn't have spoken of it, for master forbade a word being said, only I think you've mostly found it out yourself. Thomas says I'd better tell you, so if anything happens you'll be prepared. Master had a son Robert, but he went away five years ago."

"Is he alive?" asked Rhoda, unable to restrain her impatience.

"That's more than I can tell. Master believes him dead, and the chances are all that way. That's not a proper way to speak," she added, directly. "God rules, and nothing *happens* in the world. It's a sad story, but the like is often known. Robert was a handsome lad, tall and straight, with hair and eyes black as your own. Master and mistress just worshipped him, and one couldn't wonder. My husband said there wasn't his like in all the town."

Never once did the listener turn her eyes as this was said, half-breathless in her anxiety

to hear what would follow ; but Mrs. Hawthorne was obliged to pause.

"He learned to drink wine," she said, at length. "Master drank it, and it would have been strange if he hadn't. He never was much looked after, for 'twas thought he couldn't go wrong ; and there are plenty of villains in wait for young men with money. One of them snared him and got him to gambling. Thomas says they're so smooth at first, that nobody suspects how black their hearts are.

"Didn't Uncle William know it?" asked Rhoda. "I should think he would have been quick to see."

"He was the last to see, and he wasn't a man to be told," replied the house-keeper. "My husband knew Robert couldn't bear drink, and often talked with him about it ; but the mischief was worse than any one thought. Ah, well !" she added, after a short silence ; "it's no use telling all. One morning young master was gone, and before night we knew he was on the water."

"There must have been a reason for that," said the listener, in an excited tone.

"In course there was. Forgery was the reason," whispered Mrs. Hawthorne. "Robert had forged his father's name for a large amount to meet losses in gambling. It was a dreadful blow to the whole family; but it was hushed up, and few outside knew the truth."

"Was he never heard from afterwards?"

"Not directly. The vessel in which he took passage was wrecked, and only one of all on board saved. He was picked up after floating for several hours, and gave his name as John West. The family went into mourning, and saw no company; but his name was never spoken after the first few days. Mistress said it was master's orders. Poor man! he's never been the same since. Thomas heard there was trouble in more ways than one. Money was to be paid, but that wasn't the worst."

"I never dreamed of this," said Rhoda. "I thought Uncle William had always been

prosperous and happy, until his wife and daughters died."

"Ah, miss! the rich have their troubles as well as the poor; and they're often far harder to bear when pride shuts the lips. If master would speak about Robert sometimes, he might be comforted; but it would be more than my place is worth to have him know that I told you."

"And drink was the cause of it all?"

"Yes, miss," was the reply. "Thomas thinks so, and he has seen much of it. But he never'll believe that young Robert is dead."

"Never believe he is dead!" exclaimed Rhoda. "You said there was but one saved, and his name was John West."

"It's an easy matter to change one's name," replied Mrs. Hawthorne. "That would give a chance to get entirely away from all knowledge."

"What a mercy it would be if he should come back to gladden his father's last days!" said her companion.

"Ah, yes, and it's my daily prayer that God's good providence may so order it."

Carefully and well was this secret guarded, but in hours of weakness the heart had been its own betrayer. The hidden closet had been opened, and the skeleton revealed.

Whenever her uncle had seemed unhappy or troubled, Rhoda attributed it to his recent bereavement; and when these moods were upon him, she had carefully avoided everything which might seem like intrusion upon his grief.

"I am thankful to see you again," said Mr. Dalton, when, two days after this strange story had been related, she entered his room. "I have been very anxious about you. If I should lose you there would be no one left, and my old heart could hardly bear the last stroke."

"I am better, and quite able to come back as nurse," said Rhoda. "There is no cause for anxiety on my account."

"I shall be very glad to have you with me," was the reply; "and I will try to be

more considerate in future. The reading is taken out of your hands. My boy is famous; never gets tired, and is happy as a bird. He knows something about nursing too. You'll see him in a short time. He's punctual as the clock."

Mr. Dalton was now able to leave his bed, and, with the aid of a servant, walk a few steps, although one side was still nearly useless. He was gradually improving, and his friends entertained strong hopes that he might yet regain a comfortable degree of health.

But he had no such expectations. "I am too old to recover from such an attack," he said; and his physician frankly expressed the same opinion.

Rhoda, seeing him so much better, could not avoid taking courage, and spoke confidently of the time when he would be well. "We will go to Mr. Gray's in the spring," she said. "There you will gain strength rapidly."

He shook his head doubtfully. "Shall you miss me when I go?" he asked. "We

have not known each other long, but you are very dear to me, and it would be pleasant to feel that I should be missed by one."

"Miss you?" she repeated, sorrowfully. "I shall be orphaned again when you leave me; but I trust that will not be for many years."

"It will come soon," was the reply. "Strange that we think so little of death when it is inevitable. I have seldom thought of it until within the last five years. There is nothing like sorrow and trouble for bringing another world in view. It seems very near to me now, and I sometimes fear that my whole life has been wasted."

Just then there was a light tap on the door, and, in answer to Mr. Dalton's cheerful "Come in," a bright-eyed boy entered the room quietly, and stood by the chair of the invalid. Passing his hand caressingly over the brown curls, the face of the old man lighted up with a smile. "Are you getting tired of your task?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the reply. "I like coming,

and mother told me to thank you many times for the money you sent her."

"She must thank you, not me. I only paid your wages."

"I couldn't earn so much as that," said the boy. "Mother called it a present, and said I must always remember to pray for you. She will."

"Well, it does not matter whether we call the money wages or a present; I hope it will do your mother good. Here is a lady whose acquaintance I wish you to make. She has been accustomed to having boys and girls around her until she came to live with her old uncle, so I expect you will be good friends."

James looked up to the lady and replied to her words with an ease and grace which went far towards establishing a friendship between them.

"Shall I read now?" he asked a moment after, taking up the paper.

Mr. Dalton looked at his niece. "Don't mind me," she said. "I shall be very glad to hear some reading."

Rhoda did not wonder that her uncle considered his boy famous, as, in a clear, distinct voice, he read on, without any apparent effort, seeming to know just what his listener would wish to hear. At last, Mr. Dalton thought the news of the paper must be exhausted, and told him he might rest for a while, and then take up the book he had commenced the day before.

In taking something from his pocket, the boy accidentally drew out a small, handsomely bound volume, which fell to the floor.

"What have you there?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"A Testament," was the reply. "My old one was so badly worn mother said I might have a new one, and I went to buy it this morning."

"It is a very nice copy," said Rhoda, examining it with interest.

"I think so," replied the boy. "I wanted it very much, to carry to Sabbath school."

"Then you go to Sabbath school," said Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir."

"What lesson do you have for to-morrow?"

"The first chapter of John."

"Read it, so I may know how much you have to learn."

"I *have* learned it already, and I will repeat it if you would like to have me."

Rhoda opened to the chapter, and James commenced the recitation, which was completed without mistake.

"You have done well," said Mr. Dalton, although, if the truth was told, he judged more by the promptness, than by any knowledge of the Scripture. Then he seemed lost in thought for a few minutes, but roused himself when James took a book and commenced reading.

As the days went by, the usual routine of the house went on, and friends came to congratulate Mr. Dalton upon his improved health. Rhoda, relieved from the pressure of care and anxiety, was well and cheerful. The house-keeper's room was still a favorite resort, and many were the long conversations

enjoyed there, when each talked of those things in which she was most interested. Mrs. Hawthorne and her husband were the only members of the family who had any true regard for religion, and here, if anywhere, must sympathy be sought in the study of the Bible.

The health of her uncle was here discussed, the unfortunate life of his son, and the possibilities of this son's return. There was no ground for any expectation of such an event except the impression which Thomas Hawthorne had, in some way, received; but they found great pleasure in talking of it and calculating its effects.

For once, impression was correct. One night in March, when the wind was blowing a gale, and the leafless trees bent and swayed beneath its power, the house-keeper entered the room of Rhoda Smith at a late hour, without even a warning rap.

"Master Robert is back! Master Robert is back!" she exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, which betrayed her intense excitement.

"What!" asked Rhoda, springing from the bed, and but half comprehending the import of the words she had heard.

"Master Robert is back," was again repeated, and, by this time, the speaker had thrown herself into a chair quite exhausted. "Thomas has just come from him," she added.

"Where is he?" asked her companion.

"At one of the hotels," was the reply. "Thomas saw him in the street and knew him, though he is much changed. His eye betrayed him."

"Why didn't he come home?"

"He wouldn't come till sure of a welcome. He knows his father's pride. When he heard the mistress and young ladies were gone, he was nigh to break his heart. He wept as though he'd never stop."

Rhoda was now as much excited as her companion, and asked innumerable questions, few of which could be answered.

"Robert is far different from what he was when he went away," said Mrs. Hawthorne.

"Thomas is sure he has given over his dissipated habits ; but there wasn't much time to talk about it. I couldn't sleep till I let you know, and master must be told in the morning. Robert is to wait till he hears what his father says."

No sleep that night for Rhoda Smith. Vain was every effort. Upon her would devolve the task of announcing to her uncle the arrival of his son, and this was sufficient cause for wakefulness. If her cousin had returned, resolved to lead a virtuous life, there would be great rejoicing ; but, if otherwise, his presence would be a perpetual grief.

With trembling she went to her uncle the next morning. He had rested unusually well, and was in excellent spirits, welcoming her with much affection. She, on the contrary, was so silent and reserved that he asked the cause. "I believe you are not looking well," he said.

"I *am* well," was the reply ; "but I have something to tell you."

"That is nothing to trouble you. If you

have a request to make you know it will be granted, to the half of my kingdom," he said, laughing.

"You had a son once," said his niece, forgetting in her confusion the intention to approach this subject carefully.

"Who told you that?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"Your own lips revealed it," she answered.

"It was in delirium then," he said. "I would not willingly have mentioned his name, even to you."

"Were he to come back, would you welcome him home?" she asked.

"Welcome him home!" he repeated, with a strange emphasis. "He dishonored me, but I forgave him, long ago. Yet the sea will not give up its dead. The vessel in which he sailed was wrecked, and all but one on board perished."

"He may have been that one, uncle."

"No. The name of the saved man was John West."

Rhoda was about to reply to this, when

her uncle seized her hand, and looking anxiously into her face, exclaimed, "Why do you talk to me thus? Do you know anything of Robert, *my Robert?*" he repeated, in accents of tenderness.

"He might have changed his name," suggested Rhoda, still fearing to tell the whole truth.

"Did he?" asked the father.

"Yes, uncle; and he has come back," she replied. "He waits to know if you will receive him."

"Where is he? Bring him to me, I cannot wait," he said, vainly endeavoring to rise.

It was with difficulty that Rhoda calmed his agitation, telling him that his son was in the city, but not in the house.

"Then send Thomas for him at once, or" — He rang the bell, leaving the sentence unfinished. Joyfully this faithful friend and servant hastened with the message.

Through all this, never once thought Rhoda of the change the return of the

cousin might make in her future. She was thinking only of her uncle and his great joy. Rejoicing with him, she sat listening to his expressions of thankfulness and delight, until a quick, firm step was heard on the stairs. Then she went out and met one whom she was afterwards to know as "Cousin Robert."

That interview between father and son, too sacred for any human eye to witness, was prolonged, while those most interested waited anxiously for the result. At length Rhoda was summoned, Mr. Dalton taking her by the hand, while clasping that of his son, said, "You are cousins. I trust you will be friends." Then, turning to his son, he added, "I was a lonely old man until I found Rhoda. She has been like a daughter to me."

Their meeting was as cordial as could be desired. Robert expressing his gratitude that there had been some one to care for his father, and venturing the hope that she would look upon him as a brother when he

had proved himself worthy of her confidence.

Meanwhile James Burton came, and was told by Mrs. Hawthorne that master had company, and could not listen to any reading that day. Mr. Dalton was oblivious to the lapse of time as well as to every bodily want, and started with surprise when the dinner-bell sounded.

"You will no longer be obliged to take your meals alone," he said to Rhoda. "Go, now, but come again soon."

He watched them to the door, then closed his eyes to shut out every object which might distract his thoughts. He could hardly realize this great happiness which had so suddenly come to him. He sent away his dinner untasted.

Dinner, below stairs, received but little more attention. Robert Dalton was too conscious of the changes the last five years had wrought in the family to care for eating. He missed his mother and sisters, to whom he had been especially dear, and whose mem-

ory had been present with him through all his wanderings.

As usual, wine was placed upon the table. "I never drink it," said Rhoda, as her cousin offered her a glass.

"Then take it away," he said to the servant. "*I* never drink it. Nothing of the kind," he added, as the obsequious servant proposed some other liquor.

"I am glad you never drink wine," exclaimed Rhoda, overjoyed at finding one who sympathized with her in this matter.

"*I have* drank it, and to my sorrow," was the reply. "It was the cause of all my trouble. A man under the influence of wine, or other liquors, will commit acts at which he would otherwise shudder. The harpies of society understand this, and it would be well if the better portion knew it."

There was no lingering over dessert that day. Straight to his father's room went Robert Dalton, and, but for the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Hawthorne, master would have forgotten that eating was a necessary means

of sustaining life. "I am living on more substantial food," he said, as with her own hands she placed before him a daintily prepared dish.

There were no great demonstrations of joy in that household; no calling together of friends and kinsmen, to celebrate the return of this only son. On the contrary, admittance was denied to all. "We shall want a few days quite to ourselves," said the elder Mr. Dalton, and his son fully agreed with him.

When the young man had been at home for a week, Mr. Trull was summoned, and a long consultation took place between his senior partner and himself. He was a cautious man, not over-willing to put confidence in one who had betrayed a previous trust; but money is power, and he yielded to the stronger influence. It was arranged that Robert Dalton should enter the store and have some share in the business.

Of course, so strange an event as his return could not but be known despite the best

efforts at secrecy, and many were the surmises in regard to his past as well as his future life. The history of the five years in which he had been a wanderer was gradually revealed to his father, who was disposed to look upon his faults with great charity.

Drinking and gambling, the two vices which curse so many young men of our land, had tempted him to his ruin. Finding himself involved in debts of honor, to escape the importunities of the heartless creditors who had first flattered, and then stripped him, he forged his father's name for a large amount. With money thus obtained, he satisfied their demands, and then flight seemed the only means of avoiding disgrace and punishment. When he left home, it was his intention to change his name so soon as he should reach a foreign shore, thus leaving no clue to his friends.

He was able to do this, but in a way different from what he had expected, or desired. He had drawn money, sufficient not only to

liquidate his debts, but to give him means of support for a few months.

This was all swept away, leaving him upon the tempest-tossed ocean, with death staring him in the face. For hours he was in momentary expectation of being engulfed by the remorseless waves, while, like spectres, mocking at his wretchedness, came visions of home and happiness.

When rescued he was too much exhausted to speak, or in his confusion he might have betrayed his true position. His name was chosen and his story framed, while others thought him sleeping. John West, — this was his adopted name. He represented himself as the son of English parents, who had died in America; and this voyage had been undertaken for the purpose of visiting relatives whom he had never seen, and of whom his knowledge was very slight.

This story involved him in such a tissue of falsehoods that it required his utmost ingenuity to give them any appearance of plausibility. He gave a minute account of the loss

of the vessel in which he had sailed, after which, to avoid being questioned, he took refuge in silence; spending as much of his time alone as circumstances would allow.

What he should do, when once on shore, became a question of vital interest.

Through the kindness of his new friends he was supplied with a good suit of clothes and a small sum of money. Then, alone in a strange land, he was left to reap the consequences of his sin. Reared in luxury, with every want anticipated, he was ill fitted to struggle with poverty.

In his ignorance, he thought it would be easy to obtain employment in some mercantile house; but, without acquaintance or recommendation, this proved impossible. Hoarding his money carefully, he walked from one large town to another until his strength was exhausted.

Weary and foot-sore he turned from town and city, and sought shelter in the humble dwelling of an aged couple, who bade him welcome, and ministered to his necessities.

For a week he rested there, while the good woman nursed him back to health and strength. He told them the same story of parentage and bereavement, although the kindness of his host and hostess sometimes prompted him to acknowledge the truth.

He had money to pay for this week's care, but it was refused. "God forbid that I should take from such as you," said the old man. "I would sooner give you double."

They asked him of his plans for the future. "I must find some kind of work," was his reply.

"I'm only a humble man," said his host; "but I've a brother who has been porter in a warehouse of the next town for thirty years. Mayhaps he can help you to a place if you wouldn't mind hard work and small wages. I'll take my staff and go with you to-morrow, if you like."

The next morning they went to the town, and after many inquiries and a trial of his skill in writing, John West was engaged for a month to work in the same warehouse

where the brother of his host was porter. Applying himself at once to his duties, he bade the old man good-by, promising soon to visit him and his good wife.

In this house he remained for two years, gradually gaining the confidence of his employers, who talked of promoting him to a more responsible post. But in an evil hour he yielded to temptation, and raised the glass to his lips. It was a simple act, not worth a thought to his companions, but to him involving momentous consequences.

He soon neglected his business, and, at length, plunged into every excess his means would allow. The old couple, who had befriended him in his hour of need, and still had a great interest in his welfare, remonstrated. He acknowledged his folly and sin, cursed the habits which were dragging him down, yet did not abandon them. He lost his situation, and suffered from actual want, performing the most menial services to obtain the means of gratifying his base passions.

At last, when too much intoxicated to understand what he was doing, he shipped on board a vessel as common seaman. A sailor before the mast, in days when sailors' rights and sailors' comforts were considered of small consequence, he endured every hardship and insult a brutal captain could inflict. Notwithstanding all he had suffered, and the straits to which he had been reduced, he still retained some marks of better days. His tastes, degraded though they were, were yet, in many respects, far above those of the crew with which he was associated. Every manifestation of these brought upon him the severest ridicule, so that his life was one prolonged agony.

The voyage was nearly over, when, by the carelessness of a drunken messmate, some part of the cargo was set on fire. He had seen the occurrence and warned the sailor; but what drunken man ever heeded a warning?

In spite of the most determined efforts of officers and crew, the ship was soon en-

veloped in flames, and each was obliged to look to his own safety.

Few were saved, — many escaping death in one form but to meet it in another. Among the saved was John West, and, as he again floated out upon the trackless ocean with only a frail support, his whole life passed in review before him: all he had lost, all he had suffered. And for what? An unnatural excitement, a momentary gratification, and pleasure that paled ere it was enjoyed.

For these, he had bartered wealth, position, home, and friends. It had been a fearful transfer to the powers of darkness, that young life with all its hopes and ambitions.

For the first time, this youth, alone in the vast solitude, *fully realized* how terrible had been his infatuation, and there, with only the blue sky above him, through which a gracious God looked down, he implored forgiveness.

No human being near, no sail in sight, he sought to resign himself to the death which seemed inevitable; but a powerful Hand still

guarded him. He was again rescued, and, as the vessel in which he found himself was outward bound, he shipped for the return voyage, and conducted himself in such a manner as to win the respect of all on board.

When he once more trod the shores of England, his first thoughts were of the home where he had before received such kindness. He reached there as the sun was going down, while the old man read from his Bible the story of the prodigal son. Standing outside, John West listened breathlessly to each word of the simple narrative. A prayer followed, in which his own name was mentioned.

At its close he entered, and the best the house afforded was soon placed before him. The welcome he received, sincere, though grave, assured him that these humble people were still his friends, and he resolved to undeceive them in regard to his history.

It was not strange that at first they doubted the truth of what he was saying, as he told of an elegant home and doting parents, from whom he had voluntarily exiled himself. This good

old man, who drank his mug of home-brewed beer with thankfulness, and thought himself feasting when dining from a plain joint, knew little of the extravagances and dissipations of the world.

"I would not doubt your word," he said, "though it seems a strange story. Your parents must have grieved for you sadly. You should arise and go to them."

"I must earn money before I do that," was the reply. "I cannot go home as a sailor."

No entreaty could prevail upon him to remain beneath this roof for more than a night. He had a purpose to accomplish, a life to redeem. Easily obtaining from these friends a promise to keep his secret, he left them for the next town where he had formerly been employed.

Fortune favored him. There was a press of business, and two clerks were absent on account of sickness. Knowing his capabilities, his services were gladly accepted, and he was once more in a respectable position. Here, he devoted himself with the strictest

fidelity to his duties, giving evidence of rare business talents. His old companions sought him in vain, and, seeing his changed appearance, soon relinquished all claims to his acquaintance.

Conscious of rectitude, and looking forward to the time when he should resume his rightful name, he was strong to resist all temptation.

In the midst of this prosperity, he astonished his employers by giving them notice of his intention to leave at the end of a year. Unwilling to lose services which were really so valuable, they asked the reason; but none was given except that he wished to visit America.

There were few ties to sunder in this land which had proved so secure a hiding-place. Only farewells to be exchanged with the old people, and ordinary civilities with others, and John West (for by that name he still wished to be known) sailed for home.

During the voyage he mingled but little with his fellow-passengers, and carefully

avoided every conversation which might become personal. Going back to his father's house, he was not certain how he should be received. Different plans for announcing himself were considered, but no definite course of action was decided upon.

Wishing to see something of the city he had left five years before, and sure of not being recognized, he started to walk to the hotel. On his way he met Thomas Hawthorne, when he involuntarily stopped. Recovering himself upon the instant, he passed on, but the sparkle of his eye had betrayed him.

Scarcely had John West reached the room which had been assigned him, when a servant rapped, to say that a man wished to see him.

"Show him up," was the reply.

"Master Robert! Thomas!" Such was the greeting, as with closely clasped hands the two gazed at each other.

"My father?" at length the younger found voice to say.

"He is living, but much broken. He will rejoice to see you."

Questions were asked and answered until the sad truth was told. Mother and sisters gone. This was a severe blow. He had counted on their intercession with his father, and the thought of again seeing them had buoyed him up in many a dark hour.

He had always placed confidence in Thomas, and now, as briefly as possible, he recounted to him the leading events of his life during the preceding five years. "It was hard to come back and face the disgrace," he said; "but it was harder yet to remain."

"There isn't much to face," replied his companion. "The Daltons were never given to parading their troubles. You have only to keep your own counsel and walk straight forward."

Several times the gardener rose to go, and was persuaded to be again seated. His wife waited long for him that night, and when she heard the cause of his detention, she was in a

tumult. What immediately followed, I have described.

Settled at home, occupying the same room which had been his when a boy, Robert Dalton took up the broken threads of his life.

About a month after his return, he, with his cousin, made a round of calls upon their relatives. Everywhere cordially received, he parried, with easy grace, all troublesome questions, and quieted all misgivings in regard to his present character.

To his father he was dearer than ever before, and nothing could exceed the tenderness with which he ministered to his wants. Rhoda even thought that her presence could be dispensed with, and fancied that she might now seem a burden.

Venturing to express this to her uncle, she received a decided assurance to the contrary; and, soon after, her Cousin Robert took occasion to speak with her upon the subject.

"Father will hardly rejoice if my coming is the cause of your leaving," he said. "I

shall be very sorry if I make your home less pleasant."

"You do not," answered Rhoda; "but I came here because your father was alone. Now, that you are here, I am no longer needed."

"I think he had hoped that, by this time, he was necessary to you. You have no nearer relative, and there can be no place where you would be more welcome."

"I love my uncle very much," was the reply; "but I am not used to dependence. I was not brought up in luxury."

"The more reason why you should enjoy and appreciate it now. So please never again talk of leaving because I have returned."

Rhoda was silenced, and the failing health of her uncle soon made her presence absolutely necessary. There was no immediate cause for alarm, only a gradual sinking of all the powers.

James Burton came every day, and, in addition to the daily paper, read from the Bi-

ble. Mr. Dalton was thinking of the world he was so soon to enter, and, from the Book of books, sought knowledge.

He had ever paid an outward respect to the forms of religion ; but his heart had been engrossed with business and pleasure. Now that these must be given up he saw of how little worth they were when compared with the great interests which can be fully estimated only in eternity.

VII.

“ Alone, on the trackless waters,
Where never a sound was heard,
Save the roar of mighty billows,
Or scream of the wild sea-bird,
With only God for a witness,
A pledge in silence was made,
Which rescued a soul from darkness,
And gave new life to the dead.”

VISITING the store frequently Robert Dalton made himself acquainted with the business, before he attempted any participation.

It was evident that Mr. Trull regarded him with distrust; but the young man paid no heed to this. It was what he had expected as part of the punishment of his wrong-doing.

He had sinned much and suffered much, yet he had also learned much, and he soon saw where the knowledge he had acquired might be turned to practical account. With

plain statements and well-digested plans of action, he met and set aside the opposition of the junior partner.

"I am sure your father would never approve of this venture," said Mr. Trull, when one which seemed to involve great risks was proposed. "I cannot give my consent to it."

A neighboring merchant, coming in soon after, and speaking of business, said, "It was well Robert Dalton returned just in time to take his father's place. No one knows how he spent his time while away, but he must have served a good apprenticeship to the mercantile business somewhere. I thought there was some trouble when he left home, and I remember of hearing that the vessel was wrecked in which he sailed. Strange he should have allowed his family to consider him dead for so long a time; but there's no accounting for the freaks of a young man when he gets a little on the wrong track."

Mr. Trull was not inclined to reply to these remarks. He knew the cause of young

Dalton's leaving home, but of what followed he was as ignorant as his visitor.

"He seems to have improved very much," was said, evasively.

"You may well say that ; I overheard two or three of his old associates discussing him quite freely. One said, 'he was sober enough to be fifty years old.' 'Sowed all his wild oats, and not caring to harvest the crop,' said a second. Would you believe it?" added the merchant, — "he refused to drink so much as a glass of champagne with them. That is drawing the line pretty straight ; but it keeps a clear head for business."

"It would be well if our young men generally would follow his example," said Mr. Trull. "There's no danger on that side. When I was a clerk I couldn't afford tickets for the theatre and late suppers every night ; and I don't understand now where the money comes from."

"There wasn't so much gambling then as there is now ; and speaking of gambling reminds me of something else I heard said of

Robert Dalton. He has said decidedly, that he will never take another hand at any game of cards."

Had the merchant come in for the express purpose of placing this young man's character in the most favorable light, he could not have done it more effectually. Mr. Trull, cautious business man though he was, indulged in both wine and cards; yet the abstinence of Robert Dalton was a strong argument in his favor.

When left alone, he gave the proposal of his associate more consideration. His prejudice had, before, greatly influenced his judgment, prompting him to hasty condemnation. Looking at the matter calmly, the project did not seem so hazardous, and, when Robert Dalton came in, he was half inclined to withdraw his refusal at once.

"I have been thinking over the matter you proposed this morning," he said. "Are you sure you could carry it through successfully?"

"As sure as one can be of anything not yet accomplished."

The confident tone in which this was said swept away the last vestige of opposition, and Mr. Trull gave his cheerful consent. The event proved his wisdom,—the profits of the venture exceeding the most sanguine expectations.

Robert Dalton was, indeed, sober enough to be fifty years old. The buoyant, careless manner of youth had given place to the thoughtful, earnest demeanor of mature life. Beside Rhoda Smith, who was his senior by ten years, he looked the elder of the two.

The experience through which he had passed made him more considerate in his intercourse with others, and his cousin thoroughly enjoyed his society. She gained much in her knowledge of the world, as he described the different countries and scenes he had visited.

He was also benefited in a different manner; and if anything was necessary to insure kindness and sympathy to one, who had in her childhood received so little, the history of her life supplied it.

His father told him of the will made while in the country the summer before. This was, of course, destroyed; but another, executed soon after his return, made generous provision for Rhoda Smith. The son was as anxious as the father that this should be done, considering it only an act of justice.

There were some old people in England to whom he was under obligations, and to them he remitted a sum of money sufficient to give them the reputation, among their humble neighbors, of being rich.

Summer came to country and city. Under the genial influences of the season Mr. Dalton again rallied. His mind, now tranquil and happy, had a powerful influence over his body. His son and niece met every want of his heart, so far as this world was concerned, and beyond, there was an enduring portion, to which faith in Christ had given him a title.

James Burton was not the only person who now read the Bible in his presence. Morning and evening it was heard, followed by words of prayer and praise.

At the approach of warm weather, a bed for the invalid had been placed in a room adjoining the library, and this was a great addition to his comfort. Some days, he was able, with assistance, to move about a little, and a strong arm was always ready for his support.

"It would be pleasant to be in the country for a few weeks," he said, one day, to Rhoda. "I know you are longing to go, and it seems wrong to keep you here; but I cannot spare you. If I could only go with you!"

"Go where, father?" asked Robert, who heard only the last remark.

"To my native town, and Rhoda's old home," was the reply.

"How far is it? — That is not a long journey," he said, when the distance was told.

"Not long for you," replied his father; "but, for a feeble old man like me, it is not to be thought of."

Two weeks after this all was confusion in the home of Mr. Gray. Guests were expected. Mr. Dalton with his son and Aunt

Rhoda were coming. This was said again and again by the younger members of the family, as they flitted from room to room, everywhere busy in aiding the preparations. Elsie had commenced as soon as the letter was received, asking if accommodations could be found for so many.

House and barn were spacious, and never so full but there was room for more, so an affirmative answer was despatched at once.

This journey was a great surprise to the invalid, who did not consider it possible until told by his son that every arrangement had been made. "We will start the first morning you are able to ride," he said.

"I have not yet been in a carriage," replied the father. "I am afraid it must be given up."

"Not without a trial," answered Robert. "Dr. Payne says it cannot injure you. Rhoda and I are going to take care of you."

Some questions were asked, and when the old man knew what provisions had been made for his comfort, he was quite delighted with

the prospect, and desired to start the next morning.

Nature smiled upon them. Mr. Dalton was lifted into the carriage by his son and the coachman, while Rhoda arranged the cushions to suit his pleasure. Then he had only to rest, reclining when he so desired, the slow, easy motion of the carriage lulling him to sleep. Robert made the journey on horseback, riding so near to his father as to be always within call.

Besides stopping whenever it was necessary to refresh the horses, they often paused in the shade of a forest, or where a fine landscape attracted attention.

Some might have found this mode of travelling tedious ; but not so our party. Robert Dalton enjoyed it keenly. Rhoda, in anticipation of again seeing her old friends, would have thought any means of reaching them pleasant. Mr. Dalton said he gained strength with every mile passed over, while the coachman, who was country born, pronounced it "natural."

Mrs. Hawthorne had contributed something to the pleasure of this trip ; and her name was spoken with praises, when the hamper, whose packing she had herself superintended, was opened. There was everything to tempt the appetite of a traveller, which could be crowded into so small a space. " Blessings on her," said Robert, as he dismembered a chicken, and the next moment tested the merits of pickled oysters. " This is better than hotel fare, any time."

By short and easy stages the whole distance was accomplished, and the party reached Mr. Gray's. It would be useless to attempt a repetition of all the exclamations of pleasure and welcome bestowed upon Mr. Dalton and Aunt Rhoda ; although the helpless condition of the former somewhat saddened the spirits of the children.

" Much better than when I left home," was his reply to Mr. Gray, who asked in regard to his health. " I never expect to walk again without assistance ; but my want of strength is supplied by that of my son."

Robert Dalton soon found means of ingratiating himself into general favor, while with Amos he was likely to prove a formidable rival to his cousin.

The pleasantest room in the house, opening from the lower hall, had been made ready for Mr. Dalton. In it there was a large, old-fashioned chair, with castors, and another with rockers, the cushions of which had been beaten by Elsie until each particular feather must have stood on end. The best help that could be found had been secured; but Mrs. Gray was looking a little anxious.

"Just leave everything to me, while I am here," said Rhoda. "I have not forgotten how to work, and it will be a real pleasure to take charge of the kitchen. I suppose you can trust me," she added, smiling.

"I've kept all your old dresses, every one of them," exclaimed Elsie. "But I shouldn't think you'd want to work."

"We shall see," was the reply; and they did see, when, the next morning, Rhoda Smith appeared in the kitchen, clad, not in

one of her old dresses, but in the neatest of new ones.

Soon understanding what was to be done, she volunteered to cook the breakfast. "You can go about the other work. We shall need none of your help," she said to the girl, who stood staring in astonishment; and being thus dismissed, Rhoda was left in quiet possession of the premises.

When Mattie and Elsie were ready for work, they laid the table, making a few improvements on the usual style, as were suggested.

Mrs. Gray was denied admittance to the room until the breakfast was ready, when the doors were thrown open and the bell rung. To the astonishment of all, Mr. Dalton appeared, supported by a crutch and the arm of his son. Rhoda was first to exclaim.

"I did not expect to see you so early," she said. "Elsie and I were intending to bring your breakfast in about an hour."

"You see I did not wait," answered her uncle. "I really feel better this morning,

and I thought a breakfast here was worth coming for."

"Aunt Rhoda cooked it all, and I know it's just as good as it can be," whispered Elsie.

The coachman had some difficulty in understanding what was proper for him to do, but Rhoda, with her usual promptness, settled it, and all were seated around the table.

Elsie's praises were not unmerited, as both word and deed testified.

"It seems just as though you belonged here," was said to Rhoda, that day, by every member of the family; and to each she answered, with a smile, "I think I do belong here."

So much was she occupied with her uncle, and the work she *would* do, that not until nearly evening was time found for a confidential talk with Mrs. Gray.

"Do you know how much you have changed?" asked the latter.

"I know I have changed a great deal; so much that I almost doubt my own identity.

The change in my feelings is even greater than in my surroundings and appearance."

"Your present life of ease suits you better than the old one," said Mrs. Gray. "One can see that in your face."

"I am not sure of that," answered Rhoda. "I never had reason to complain while here. The trouble was within, rather than without. My rebellious spirit was unwilling to accept the discipline sent upon me. I know I was unfortunately situated after my mother died. I had no one to love me, and my life was very lonely; but I might have borne it more patiently if I had believed, as I do now, that God knows best."

"Every one needs to believe that. It is the only consolation one can have in sorrow, from which no mortal is exempt. Your uncle, too, has learned it," she added, questioningly.

"Yes," replied Rhoda; "and he receives the lesson with thankfulness. How strange are the means God uses to bring us back to himself!"

From this point the conversation drifted to the events which had occurred during their absence from each other. Rhoda described the return of her cousin, and the effect it had upon her uncle, as well as herself.

What had been the cause of his leaving home, and the silence of his father upon the subject, Mrs. Gray did not ask. A single remark of Rhoda's gave a clue to what the *primary* cause might have been.

"Cousin Robert and I agree, perfectly, in our ideas of temperance. He says he has sinned enough, and suffered enough, in consequence of wine-drinking; so uncle takes his wine alone."

To a question suggested by this last remark, she replied, "Uncle says he is too old and too much of an invalid to change his habits, but he is sure there would be less unhappiness in the world if people would banish liquors from their homes. They are a curse to the rich as well as the poor. Misery and wretchedness follow in their train."

"You will never change your mind on that point," said Mrs. Gray.

"Never!" was the emphatic reply. "All I have seen and heard during the last year has confirmed it."

When it was time for evening worship, Mr. Dalton desired that the family should meet in his room. "I wish to enjoy it with you," he said.

It was a delightful close to a well-spent day; after which they separated cheerful and happy, acknowledging the tender love of Him who had crowned their lives with blessings.

In the morning Dr. Webb called, and, at the request of the invalid, left some medicine which he thought might help give tone and vigor to his system. Rhoda received some very decided compliments from her old friend, who had always been disposed to overlook her faults.

"You are a handsome woman," he said. "I wish we could keep you here just to look at, if nothing else."

"I lived here several years," replied Rhoda, laughing. "I never heard before, that I was handsome. You have made a new discovery."

"I believe I have," answered the doctor; "but I guess there has been some change in you. We are all changing too. Got a new minister, and I don't know but we shall have a new doctor."

"I have heard of the minister."

"You'll see him too. He does more good in his visits to some sick people than I can. He prescribes for the mind, and I for the body. He was at Mrs. Lunt's yesterday when I went by, so I knew Amy wouldn't need me."

"Do tell me of Amy," was the quick reply. "I have asked Mrs. Gray, but she has heard nothing directly from her for several weeks."

"She is very comfortable this summer. Suffers less than she has for many years, and seems much stronger. She is better provided for, too, and that is a great benefit. She told me that your uncle gave her a large

sum of money; and he couldn't have bestowed it where it would have done more good."

"What do you think of uncle?" now asked Rhoda, anxious to hear the opinion of one in whom she had so long placed confidence. "Will he ever be able to walk?"

"I should think not," was the candid answer. "Yet he may live for some time, and perhaps be better than he is now. His journey and a change of air will do him more good than anything else. Your nursing too, — I always depended upon that. Strange affair about his son," added the doctor. "He seems to be a smart young man; but he has seen a good deal of the world. There are strongly marked lines in his face. Good-morning."

The old-fashioned gig was driven from the door as this salutation was uttered, and Rhoda went to her uncle's room. "So you have grown handsome," he said with a smile. "I made that discovery a long time ago, but you care so little for compliments, that I have

never said much about it. Where is Robert?" he asked soon after.

"He has gone off on horseback. I heard him ask Mr. Gray something about Cross Mountain, and he may have gone there."

"I wish I could go there once more," said Mr. Dalton. "It would be a great pleasure to me."

"I intend to go while we are here," responded Rhoda.

Her uncle looked up in astonishment. "You didn't enjoy going last year," he said. "The water of the old well was to you like the waters of Marah."

"The *bitterness* was in my heart. It is gone now."

"Then you will be happy under any circumstances. I think the bitterness has all gone from my heart. Robert's coming back to me was such an unexpected blessing, and so much greater than I deserved. He is a good son, and he will be a good brother to you, when I am gone."

Rhoda could never speak calmly of her

uncle's leaving her, and she turned his attention from the painful subject by repeating what Dr. Webb had said of Amy Hill.

"You must go and see her," he said.

"I certainly wish to," was the reply.

"Then there are Mr. Balch's family, and your Cousin Reuben, and I know not how many others. You will need, at least, a week for them all. I must manage to spare you for that time, if I can engage Elsie's services. How is it, Elsie?" he asked as he saw her going through the hall. "Can you take care of me for a week?"

"All alone, do you mean?" she asked, with wonder in her eyes.

"Oh, no, indeed," he replied, laughing. "I only wish to know if you can look after me a little while this lady goes visiting."

"Yes, sir, I shall be very glad to; but I hope Aunt Rhoda won't stay away very long. Not if she's going back with you," she added.

"I expect she is going back with me," said Mr. Dalton, "and that is why I am willing to

do without her company while here, for a few days."

Robert returned just before noon, and gave his father an account of his ride. He had been to Cross Mountain, had drank from the old well, and gazed delightedly upon the surrounding country. "I think you told me that there was some doubt as to the rightful owner of that place."

"Yes; so Mr. Gray says. It was always considered questionable whether Foster could honestly claim it on the score of debt; but no one *knows* anything about it. He was father's tenant for many years, and after it came into Mira's possession he remained there until Smith spent all the property she had, except that, and then they were obliged to find a home there themselves. It was a bad business all round, and I ought to have looked after it at the time. There was nothing left for Rhoda."

"There is something for her now," said the son. "She shall never miss her birth-right in the future."

The call to dinner interrupted this conversation, and it was not resumed that day. When all had left the table Robert Dalton said to the coachman, "The horses must need exercise by this time. Harness them up, and let them explore the country a little. Cousin Rhoda may decide which way to drive. Mrs. Gray, I hope you will accept a seat in the carriage," he added, turning to his hostess. "There will be room for all who will go, and it is a delightful day to be out of doors."

Mattie and Elsie each received a particular invitation to occupy part of the carriage, and were overjoyed at the prospect of "riding in a real coach, just such as you read about."

Mrs. Gray decided that it would be best for her to remain at home, so Aunt Rhoda and the girls prepared themselves for the drive.

"Which way are we going?" asked Elsie so soon as they had started. "I should like to go through the village."

"*I* should like to call upon Amy Hill," said Rhoda. "We can go through the woods,

and that will be much more pleasant than the dust of the village."

The coachman received his directions, after which Mattie and Elsie had most of the talking between themselves, their companion being inclined to silence. The horses were in good condition, their driver in a mood for displaying their speed, and Mrs. Lunt's cottage was soon reached.

So unexpected an arrival brought the good woman to the door in a maze of wonder, from which she hardly recovered during the call. She was delighted at again seeing Rhoda, but troubled to know exactly how she should be treated. Amy had no such anxiety. She gave her friend the welcome her loving heart prompted; expressing frankly the pleasure she felt in her improved condition.

This call must necessarily be so short that Rhoda was hardly willing to share it with her young companions; but they were so much interested in Amy Hill, that they wished to see her, if only for a moment. She was very glad to see them again, and

told them this in so pleasant a manner that they could well afford to be satisfied with but few words from her. Mrs. Lunt then found means of entertaining them in her garden, where the flowers and fruit excited their admiration.

There was a great contrast between the two women who conversed together in the cottage ; but it was far less than it had been a year ago. Rhoda Smith's face would never lose its expression of force and strength ; but the lines about the mouth had softened, and her smile was genial and winning.

Her companion was quick to notice the change and divine the cause, while never heart beat with more sincere gratitude than hers. Each inquired of the other's prosperity, and spoke of her own experience.

It was not easy for them to separate, leaving so much unsaid, but the afternoon was passing rapidly, and tea was always early at Mr. Gray's. Rhoda promised to make a long visit within a few days, and called "the girls," who were "not half ready to go."

When they reached home Mr. Dalton was sitting in his easy-chair, under the shade of a tree, waiting for them, as he said. He was interested in hearing of Amy Hill and her aunt, inquiring if they were provided with everything necessary for their comfort.

Elsie entertained him with an amusing description of the people who had stared at them from doors and windows. "You must have produced quite a sensation," he said.

"Yes, uncle, we did. One man took off his hat and bowed to us."

"I thought he was bowing to the driver," said Mattie, whose ideas of her own consequence were somewhat less exalted than those of her sister.

A call to supper was followed by the appearance of Robert Dalton, who assisted his father to the house.

The evenings were very quiet and still in the old farm-house, giving time to profitable thought and social converse. The only bustle was in a large, airy room where the foaming milk was poured into pans and tubs, pre-

paratory to the next day's manufacture of butter and cheese.

Here Rhoda had, formerly, held undisputed sway; and she now sometimes indulged herself in a short visit to the old quarters. One evening, in the absence of the girl, who usually presided here, she volunteered to take the entire charge of the milk.

"This seems like old times," said Mr. Gray, as he emptied his brimming pails. "I have often read that 'Blessings brighten as they take their flight,' and I am convinced of its truth. I guess we never really appreciated *you* until you had taken your flight. I wish there was any prospect that you would come back to us. I don't mean as maid-of-all-work," he hastened to add, much to Rhoda's amusement. "We relied so much upon your judgment that we hardly know how to keep house without you."

"Perhaps I shall come back," she replied. "No place seems so much like home as this. But I can make no plans. While uncle lives I shall remain with him."

"There will always be a home for you here," said her friend, heartily ; "and I am very glad you could visit us this summer."

"Uncle feared so many of us would be a burden, but we could come in no other way."

"Room enough for all," was the reply. "Our only trouble was in regard to the work. I tried to hire another woman, but didn't succeed ; and I told my wife you must be satisfied with what we could do as we are."

"I am sure every one is satisfied," answered Rhoda. "Uncle's health is really improving, and he seems very happy."

"I think he carries his happiness with him," said Mr. Gray. "But I must not stop here," he added ; "Brindle and Star will think they have a long time to wait. Our cows are doing finely this summer."

"So here you are, Cousin Rhoda," said a cheerful voice soon after Mr. Gray went out.

"Hard at work ! Work becomes you too, or you become work, which is the same thing. I have seen a good many dairy-rooms and

dairy-maids in my life, and I really think this sight eclipses all."

"Save your compliments for some one who can appreciate them. They don't suit me very well, and it is hardly worth while to come so far to waste your words."

"I did not come for that," replied Robert Dalton, for he it was. "I came to see what this building might be. I think the vines attracted me, and, coming in, I only expressed what first suggested itself."

"It is a pleasant room," said Rhoda; "always cool and airy. The best place in town for milk."

Amos came soon, seeking his friend to tell a story, and she was left to her work, which she performed as thoroughly as when her living was dependent upon it.

Each day was crowded with its own duties and pleasures. It was no light task to furnish well-cooked food for so many, and keep the different rooms of the house in attractive order. Mrs. Gray was often glad to fall back upon Rhoda for a well-arranged programme

of the work. Mr. Gray, too, found efficient help in Mr. Dalton's coachman, John Ramsey, who enjoyed going into the field, and trying his skill in labor to which he had been accustomed when a boy.

At length the time came for the visit to Cousin Reuben's, and a large trunk was packed to be carried there. Elsie, who assisted in the packing, said Aunt Rhoda was going to give away almost everything she had, before she went to the city. "There isn't a single empty corner in the whole trunk," she said to Mattie.

Rhoda did not care to startle her cousins with a coach and span, so Judson Gray put the trunk into the old family wagon, and drove over one pleasant morning.

"Glad to see you, Cousin Rhody," said Reuben, who was at work, mending a fence by the side of the road. "You see I'm trying to fix up a little. I didn't know as you'd get over here. Told Samantha last night I was afraid you wouldn't think t'was worth while to visit such poor folks. We're better off

than the last time you came, though. Saved some things out of the fire, and I'm one of them. Samanthy'll be mighty glad to see you."

It was useless to wait for Reuben Smith to exhaust his stock of short sentences, and they drove on, leaving him to his whistling and hammering. A new house had been erected upon the site of the old one, and three rooms were already habitable. A good-sized barn was ready to receive the crops of the year, and frames for sheds were standing, as yet uncovered.

In a flutter of excitement, Samantha came to the door, and in a confused way welcomed her visitor.

"Have you room for this trunk?" asked Rhoda, as Judson took it from the wagon. "I could not come very well without it."

"There is plenty of room, such as it is," was the answer. "We're all in confusion, but I'll make you as comfortable as I can."

"No danger but I shall be comfortable," said her cousin. "I came, expecting to en-

joy every moment of my visit. I have heard good news of you."

Samantha's face lighted up at this, and she was about to reply, when her husband's voice was heard.

"Glad you've come, Rhody," he exclaimed. "Been wanting to see you, ever since the fire. That was the best thing ever happened to me. I've squared off with Lang, and I shall pay some other debts when I take my crops off the ground. Guess I shall have good luck this year."

"You will, if you are willing to work."

"Don't I look like it?" he asked, in reply. "I'm pretty busy these days."

Rhoda did not doubt this assertion. He looked like a man who worked, and, during her visit, she had ample opportunity to witness his industry. He had a small job to do, about quarter of a mile from the house, that he guessed he could get through with before dinner, and he enjoined upon his wife the necessity of "blowing the horn loud."

The horn was sounded, calling him to din-

ner, just the right time, but it seemed doubtful if he would find an opportunity to eat, so much was he engaged in talking. Rhoda thought he was making up for his silence while smoking and dozing through so many years.

"How do you get along without your pipe?" she asked.

"Well enough," was the reply. "Pretty hard work, at first, but got used to it. Costs too much to use tobacco. Can have all the tea and sugar we want now. Always get it when Samanthy says. Can't stop any longer now," he added, as he went out of the house, and shouldered his hoe, whistling.

When the housework was done that afternoon, Rhoda opened her trunk, and transferred its contents to the shelves and closets of the new house. She also gave her cousin a sum of money, to be expended for furniture when the house should be completed.

Reuben was told of this when he came in at evening, and added his thanks to those of his wife. "Very kind in you to do so muc'.

for us, Cousin Rhody," he said. "I know I don't deserve it. Didn't treat you as I ought to when we were at father's together. Been sorry for it a good many times. Hope you haint laid up any hardness against me. Folks used to call you homely; but you're a good-looking woman now. I'll say that for you anywhere."

Rhoda hastened to assure him that she had no hard feelings against him or any one else. She was very glad to help him, now he was trying to help himself. He told her his plans for improving his farm, and reclaiming an old pasture which had once been valuable, but was now completely overrun with bushes and briars.

"It will take a good deal of hard work to do all you propose," she said.

"I am able to do it," was the cheerful reply, as he took the milk-pails and went out.

"He don't seem to mind anything about hard work," said his wife, when he was beyond the sound of her voice. "I wish he would take more time to rest; but he says he

can't afford it. There aint anybody round here works harder than he does."

Mr. Balch said the same, and prophesied that within a few years Reuben Smith would not only pay his debts, but "have something beforehand." This neighbor had, from the first, assisted him with counsel, and the more substantial aid of money and credit.

It was he who effected a settlement with Lang, on more advantageous terms than had seemed possible. The rumseller was chagrined and angry at being compelled to specify the charges against his creditor; but Mr. Balch insisted. The result was what he expected. The footing up of the charges was much less than the sum stated. The particulars of this settlement were soon generally known, and every old toper who had ever paid a bill to Lang was ready to accuse him of dishonesty.

No one more keenly enjoyed the discomfiture of this unprincipled man than Rhoda Smith, to whom Aunt Lizzie gave a graphic description of Luther's management. "I

don't suppose it will stop his selling liquor," she said ; " but it will help make him unpopular. His customers will look after him a little closer. He has done harm enough in this town, and, to tell the truth, I think his business is the meanest a man can engage in."

Her companion endorsed this opinion, saying, " A man who will sell liquor to another, when he knows it will be the means of making him a brute and a beggar, would commit any other crime if there was no law to punish him. For my part, I wish selling liquor was a state-prison offence."

" Some of the worst men in the country would then receive their deserts," said Mr. Balch, joining in the conversation. " I was very glad to meet Lang in a business way, and am not anxious to keep the matter secret. Reuben Smith has drank liquor enough ; but I presume he has paid for a great deal that he never saw."

This was severe denunciation ; but facts sustained it. The old farm on Cross Mountain was not the only property that had

changed hands through the baseness of a rum-seller. Amy Hill's father had once been a well-to-do farmer; but his wife, in her last sickness, was dependent upon charity.

Rhoda spent a long day with Amy before she returned to Mr. Gray's. Mrs. Lunt, feeling obliged to devote most of her time to the preparation of a dinner and supper worthy to place before her guest, came into the room only occasionally, and then stopping but a moment to ask a question or make some remark.

There was no lack of comfort in this home. The ground connected with the house had again been planted by the kindness of neighbors, and there was promise for the winter. "Aunt Milly considers herself quite a farmer," said Amy. "Last year our crops were very fine. We had a great abundance of apples, and enjoyed the luxury of giving. That was a great privilege to us, and I trust we were grateful."

Mr. Dalton had not allowed his niece to visit these friends empty-handed, and, not-

withstanding their remonstrances, she insisted upon their receiving the money which had been sent by her.

When ready to leave that evening, she was surprised to find quite a large bundle in her wagon. "It is for your cousin," said Mrs. Lunt. "Amy and I have thought a good deal about her since the fire; so we got together a few things we could spare as well as not. I should have sent them before, only I hoped she'd come over herself, and I knew they hadn't much room where they were last winter."

"That beats me," said Reuben, when he saw the bundle and was told who had sent it. "Don't seem right to take it from them women; but never mind, Samantha, we shall have something to give them in return."

Mrs. Smith said her husband had never enjoyed any visit so much as this with "Cousin Rhody," and when Aunt Lizzie, with her son and daughter, came over to take tea with them, he really felt that they were beginning to live. He began to think himself of some

consequence, and that, to a man like him, was a great point gained.

Soon after this visit Mr. Dalton and his party started for the city, making the journey much more rapidly than before.

They were expected at home, and great preparations had been made for their reception, Mrs. Hawthorne quite eclipsing herself. All this was very pleasant to Rhoda; but, when the first excitement was over, she began to feel lonely and dissatisfied.

The weeks went by; Mr. Dalton's health remained much as it had been when in the country. James Burton was reinstated in his position as reader.

Many calls were received from relatives and friends of the family, and occasionally a few were invited to spend the evening at the house; when Rhoda, supported by her cousin, acted the part of hostess by no means discreditably. Her elegant and tasteful dress, faultless even when judged by the standard of those around her, had much to do with the favorable impression she produced.

Through Mrs. Hawthorne she had made the acquaintance and engaged the services of a young girl who was dependent upon her own exertions for the support of herself and her youngest sister. Some one had taught her dress-making, and, having a natural talent for fitting and trimming, she became skilful in the art.

But being almost unknown, and having no friends except among those who were obliged to economize their expenses, work was not so remunerative as she had hoped.

In the summer she had taken rooms in the house with Mrs. Burton, and soon attracted her attention. James had been the first to make their acquaintance by offering to carry a pail of water up the stairs for Jennie, the younger sister. She looked at him a moment, astonished at his kindness, then gave him the pail, and led the way to the room she called "home."

After this, he often assisted her in various ways, until, at last, he rapped regularly at the door, each day, to ask if he could do any-

thing for Miss Dunn. He brought shavings for her as he did for his mother, and executed commissions of all kinds. Thus James established himself in the good graces of the sisters, and one evening introduced his mother to them.

A few days after this, Mrs. Burton spoke of them to Mrs. Hawthorne, and asked her to call upon them. Alcey Dunn was then at work upon the skirt of a rich dress which had been sent her from a fashionable shop, and was to be completed that day. It was so elaborately trimmed that it attracted the attention of the visitor, who took the liberty to ask what she was to receive for the work.

Alcey named a sum so small in comparison with the price usually paid for such work, that Mrs. Hawthorne involuntarily uttered an expression of surprise.

"I know that is not what it is worth, but I am very glad to do it even at such a price."

At once the good English woman thought of a plan to aid her, and, when Rhoda Smith returned, she lost no time in telling her of

these two young girls who were so alone in the world. "I'm sure you'd like her work, miss, if you'd be pleased to try her. It always goes to my heart to see such young creatures toiling for the bread they eat."

The fact that they were orphans was sufficient to enlist the sympathies of her to whom this was addressed. She sent for Alcey Dunn to come to the house that she might consult her in regard to some dresses she proposed to have remade.

Something in the looks of the young dress-maker reminded her of Amy Hill. There was the same golden hair, and the same sweet smile wreathing the small mouth; but there was a brightness in the face of Alcey Dunn which the invalid's had never known. She could remain only long enough to examine the dresses, admire the rich laces with which they were to be trimmed, and then hasten home to complete the work now on hand.

Rhoda was charmed with her appearance and manifest taste, and engaged her services for several days. "You can take your sister

with you," she said; "Mrs. Hawthorne will find a pleasant place for her."

Alcey felt that she had found a friend, while Jennie was delighted with the prospect of going to so grand a house. Mrs. Burton congratulated her young friend, knowing by her own experience that she would be generously treated.

As Rhoda had desired, Alcey and her sister went together to the house of Mr. Dalton, and Mrs. Hawthorne gladly took charge of the child, who insisted upon making herself useful. "I never sit still and do nothing," she said, in her womanly way. "Sister says I must be industrious, and she thought you would find me some work for to-day."

"What can you do?" asked the house-keeper, smiling at this earnestness.

"I can knit, and sew, and do errands; I can sweep too, and tidy up the house."

"That is doing very well," was the reply. "But I think I'll send you into the garden this morning. My husband is the gardener. You'll find him under the trees," she said,

pointing down the walk, at the foot of which were some large fruit-trees. "Perhaps you can help him."

Mrs. Hawthorne watched the child as she went through the garden, saw her standing quietly as she talked with Thomas; and then, sure she was in her proper place, went about her own work. In about an hour Jennie entered the house-keeper's room with a basket of pears, which she said she was to carry to the lady. "Would you let me take them to her myself?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the house-keeper, "and I will show you the way."

Alcey looked up from her work in surprise at seeing her sister. "Why, Jennie!" she exclaimed.

"A gentleman in the garden told me I could bring these to the lady," she said, apologizing for her presence, as she placed the fruit upon the table and turned to leave the room.

Rhoda called her back, and began talking with her, asking how she had spent the morning. At first, she replied in monosyllables,

evidently afraid of being intrusive ; but she forgot this as she became interested.

"I think I had better go back now," she said, after a time. "I was helping in the garden."

"You must stop and eat some of these pears, before you go," replied her friend. "We will all eat them together. Shouldn't you like some?" she asked, seeing the look of indecision upon the child's face.

"I should like one," replied Jennie ; " but I should like better to carry it to Debby Butters."

"And who is Debby Butters? That isn't a very pretty name," said Rhoda.

"I know it isn't, and I guess *she* isn't very pretty ; but she's good, and sister says she bears her pain with a great deal of fortitude."

The listener smiled, but Jennie proceeded : "I didn't tell you who she was, but I will. She's a little girl, who lives in the same house we used to, with her grandmother. Her father is a sailor, and her mother went off and left her ; so she has nobody but her

grandmother to take care of her. She can't walk much, and never goes out-doors. Sometimes Alcey used to give her a penny to buy an apple for her, and then she was always so glad."

Rhoda was interested in the simple story of Debby Butters, and made many inquiries in regard to her. "We will send some good things to Debby this evening, but you can eat the pears all the same. There are enough for her besides these."

"Then I would rather carry one to Debby's grandmother," urged the child. However, she was at last persuaded to share the luscious pears, and then returned to the garden, where Mr. Hawthorne found employment for her busy feet and hands.

Alcey Dunn was allowed to exercise her own taste, her employer looking on but to admire. She enjoyed the day, scarcely conscious of fatigue when the hours of labor were over.

Rhoda gave her the price she had been accustomed to pay a dress-maker recommended

by her aunt. "You must have made a mistake," said Alcey, when she had counted the money. "Here is quite too much; double what I have ever received before, and Jennie has been with me too."

"I have only given you what is your due," was the reply. "I am perfectly satisfied. There is no reason why you should not be paid as well as others."

Jennie found a basket of fruit and cakes, ready to be carried to Debby Butters, and her sister consented to call upon her that evening, so there need be no delay in delivering the precious gift. Poor Debby had been suffering more than usual, and was wishing she could have something nice to eat, when her friends opened the door of her grandmother's room.

"Sights and sights of goodies!" exclaimed the child, as the contents of the basket were displayed. "I shall feel better now. I've wanted something all day, and to think you should be the one to bring it! I thank you more than I ever thanked anybody before."

"A kind lady gave them to me for you; so you must thank her," replied Jennie, disclaiming all merit in the affair.

"Then I thank her, you tell her," said Debby, too much delighted to wonder how the kind lady had heard of her.

The grandmother, who had been talking with Alcey, now came forward, and expressed her gratitude. "The like has never been seen in this room, since I lived here," she said. "We've been badly off for a few days, and Debby has been getting weak. I don't mind for myself, but it's hard for her."

Thus were four new names added to the list of those in whose welfare Rhoda Smith was interested. She would not forget little Debby Butters, or the grandmother who cared for her."

Alcey became her entire dependence in all matters of dress, while Jennie was her prime favorite. Her uncle had several times seen this child in the garden, and one day asked James Burton if he knew who he was.

Of course James knew who she was, and

could tell a great deal about her, which he did not hesitate to do, particularly as he had an interested hearer.

When Rhoda next came into the room, her uncle spoke of the child. "James told me that her sister is your dress-maker," he said.

"Yes, sir, she is, and a friend of mine as well."

"Spoken like yourself, Rhoda. I am sure she has found a friend. I should really like to see her. She must understand her business, judging from the specimens of her work that I have seen. You might recommend her to some of your friends."

"I have done so," was the reply; "and she is quite popular."

The elder Mr. Dalton was wishing to see Alcey Dunn. The younger Mr. Dalton *had* seen her, and thought her face one of the sweetest he had ever looked upon.

He resolved to become acquainted with her, and one day when he was in the garden, seeing Jennie, to whom he had before spoken, he gave her a bouquet of late flowers, telling

her she could keep it herself, or give it to the person she loved best in the world.

Her reply was what he had expected. "Then I shall give it to sister, for I love her best."

This opened the way for quite a long talk, during every moment of which the child kept her large blue eyes fixed upon the face of her companion. She must have thought him worthy of confidence, for she gave him quite a minute description of her home, and the people living in the house.

If it was chance that brought Robert Dalton into the hall that evening, just as the young dress-maker and her sister were passing through, he certainly blessed his stars for the lucky chance. Jennie had the bouquet in her hand. "I gave the flowers to sister," she said. "I am going to carry them home for her, and then she will take them."

"I hope she will like them," he replied, opening the hall-door and bowing respectfully as they went out.

After this, such encounters were frequent,

yet their acquaintance had progressed no further than an exchange of salutations when winter set in. Chance again favored the gentleman. Alcey Dunn was going from her work, later than usual, when the confusion incident to an alarm of fire rendered the streets quite unsafe for a lady.

Fortunately Robert Dalton was passing in the same direction, saw her, and begged the privilege of accompanying her home. Rejoiced at seeing a friend, when one was so much needed, she thankfully availed herself of his kindness.

At the door they met Jennie, who, alarmed at the long absence of her sister, was weeping bitterly. "Mrs. Burton and James were gone, so I had to stay all alone," she said; and at the thought her tears flowed afresh.

If any excuse could have been found for stopping, the gentleman certainly would have done so; but, finding none, he was obliged to leave, even before Jennie had dried her tears. Yet something had been gained, and upon this slight foundation he built an airy castle.

Christmas was at hand. Robert Dalton invested quite largely in books and toys ; and, on the morning of this holiday, three children were made happy by the reception of presents, beyond anything they had ever expected. Jennie Dunn, James Burton, and Debby Butters, each found, in addition to a well-filled stocking, a large package on the pillow.

The exclamations of delight were as various as the characters and circumstances of the recipients. Great was their curiosity to know who had thus remembered them.

"Grandma says a black man, with white teeth, brought mine," said little Debby Butters to Jennie.

"That's who brought mine," answered her friend. "Sister asked him who sent the things."

"What did he say?" asked Debby, interrupting her.

"He said, 'Dunno noffin 'bout it,' and went downstairs, laughing."

James Burton's parcel had been brought

by some one answering to this description ; so they decided that the presents must have all been sent by one person, and that person must be very rich, especially, as the older members of the families had not been overlooked in their distribution. Rhoda Smith understood the matter, and Alcey had a shrewd suspicion of whom Santa Claus might be ; but the children were profoundly ignorant. They knew their Christmas dinners were sent by " the lady at Mr. Dalton's," and pronounced her name with blessings, as they ate.

"There's a hape o' cooking done in the house," said an Irish servant who had recently come under Mrs. Hawthorne's jurisdiction. "Sure it's a wonder where it's all going. There's enough for the like o' ten families like this."

The house-keeper attended to the distribution of this " hape o' cooking," happy in carrying out the wishes of "master's niece." For the home table she made sumptuous preparations, and then grew radiant, as the

praise bestowed upon the viands by the invited guests was repeated by the servants.

Mr. Dalton was able to sit at the table with his guests, and enjoy the feast, seeming to lay aside the air of an invalid.

"We shall expect you to dine with us on New Year's day," said his sister Laura to him, when she left that evening. "We shall hope to see more of you now that brother William seems so well," she added to Rhoda. "You will not need to confine yourself at home so closely."

Invitations to Mrs. Fulton's were received, but Mr. Dalton excused himself from being present. He was not so well as usual. "It is nothing serious," he said, "but I shall be more comfortable here at home. Grand dinners are not so much to my taste as they were once."

"They will never be much to my taste," said Rhoda. "I should prefer to stay with you. We might have a very pleasant evening in your room."

"I know we might," replied her uncle ;

"but it is best for you to go. You must see more of society this winter than you did the last. I am beginning to think a little about having my children settled in life," he added, with a smile.

"Don't make any plans for me," said Rhoda, laughing. "They will certainly fall through if you do, and leave you discomfited."

"I am not anxious to have you leave me," replied her uncle. "You need fear no conspiracy on my part. I only thought there might be some danger of such an event."

Rhoda blushed as this was said, and he wondered if his suspicions were correct. If he had heard the unqualified and almost rude refusal of the hand of one of his friends, only the evening before, he would not have misinterpreted her blushes. As it was, he looked serious, and desired her to dress with unusual care, as her Aunt Laura was very fastidious.

One week, one little week, and it mattered not to him of society or settlement in this

world. He was dead. The blow came suddenly, at last. James Burton was alone with him, reading from the Bible, when he observed a strange expression upon his face. His lips moved, but they uttered no sound.

Instantly the boy summoned assistance. Rhoda, who was first to hear the call, bent over her uncle in an agony of fear. She clasped his hands entreating him to speak; but his voice was hushed.

Dr. Payne was called, a messenger despatched for Robert, and the whole house was laid under tribute for his relief. But it availed nothing. The death-angel had placed its seal upon lip and brow.

There was an imposing funeral, and then William Dalton was laid to rest by the side of wife and children.

VIII.

“Out of the fires of shame and sin
God is able to garner in
A glorious harvest of souls.”

THE will of her uncle had placed Rhoda Smith in an entirely independent position, giving her a home where she then was, so long as she should remain unmarried. Robert, too, had been generous in carrying out the wishes of his father, and this, together with their common sorrow, had made their relationship seem like that of brother and sister.

He could speak to her of his past life, of the temptations which had beset his path, and to which he had so weakly yielded. “We have both come out of the fire, Cousin Rhoda, and therefore should be able to sympathize with each other,” he said one even-

ing when they were seated together in the library.

"I can never forget my sensations when I saw the flames leap from mast to rigging, and knew there was no possibility of saving the ship. In that one instant every sin I had committed seemed to rise before me."

"I can never think of you as being other than you are now, honorable and upright," said his cousin.

"Would God I had never been otherwise," he responded, earnestly. "If you knew all, I fear you would never trust me, and I sometimes wonder how I can trust myself."

"I should not think of distrusting you, Cousin Robert. One who acknowledges his own weakness, and seeks strength from God is sure to receive it."

"I have learned that by experience," was the reply. "Strange I was so easily led astray," he added, musingly. "I did not care much for drink, at first, and I had no particular taste for gambling. The influence of one man made me the wretch I was. I

have met that man on the street to-day, and he had the audacity to address me."

"I hope you did not speak to him," said his companion.

"I certainly did not."

"Then you are fairly rid of him."

"I am not so sure of that. He is a villain of the deepest dye, and will not mind a rebuff when he has a purpose to accomplish."

"What purpose can he have?" innocently asked Rhoda.

"He probably intends to make money out of me in some way. If he cannot induce me to gamble, he may try some other plan of lining his pockets at my expense. This man knows more of my career of dissipation before leaving home than any one else. It would not be pleasant to have this reported to the public, — a fact that he will understand as well as I. He may hope to receive a bribe for keeping silent."

"And will you bribe him?" asked Rhoda.

"What would you do?" he asked in reply, an amused smile playing around his mouth.

"Tell him to say what he pleases. He cannot injure you without compromising himself."

"He will be careful not to do that among respectable people, and with his own set he has nothing to lose. There are many ways in which he could start a report and yet conceal his own agency in the matter. However, I have not the slightest idea of keeping him in funds, let the consequence be what it may."

"Is his home here?" asked Rhoda.

"Here as much as anywhere," was the reply. "He spends his time wherever he can find victims. If you should attend the theatre, you would see him there, dressed in the height of fashion, and having the appearance of a gentleman. When I became acquainted with him he was admitted to good society, and was quite a favorite with most of the ladies."

"How could any decent person tolerate such a man?"

"His true character was unknown, except to those whose ruin he had accomplished, and

they were not likely to betray him. He was a specious villain."

"Will he be received into society now?"

"It would not be strange if he should. He is a handsome man, with a most pleasing address."

"Is he young?"

"He cannot be, although he professed to be less than thirty when I first knew him. I presume he is fifty years of age, and, from my hasty glance at him to-day, I judge the last five years have told upon his looks. I must speak to Thomas about him. He is a shrewd counsellor, and I may need his assistance."

Thomas did not need to be informed of the gambler's presence in the city. He had seen Paul Romare (for by this romantic name was the scoundrel known), and, notwithstanding his confidence in "young master," he was really anxious. He had watched his movements before, and knew how persistently he followed up any one whom he had marked as "game."

"I was coming to tell you this same, he

said, when Robert Dalton had told him of his meeting with Romare. "He's back for no good, you may count sure on that; I saw him with some young men this afternoon. If their fathers understood him as well as I do, he'd soon leave town. You'll meet him again to-morrow."

True prophecy; and well timed was the meeting for evil purpose. Robert Dalton was talking with a friend of his father, when Romare passed.

"Be sure to remember your engagement for this evening," he said, with a careless bow, as though addressing one with whom he was on intimate terms.

"Is he an associate of yours?" asked the old gentleman of his companion.

"No, sir," replied young Dalton, yet so much astonished was he at the audacity of the gambler that he made no explanation of the strange occurrence.

"I am glad of it, for I have heard some things not much to his credit."

Here the conversation was interrupted,

and in no enviable frame of mind the young merchant returned to the store. An hour after, he received a note, inviting him to a supper that evening, at the most fashionable hotel in the city.

“Only a few congenial spirits, mutual friends in days gone by.

“Your obd’t serv’t,

“PAUL ROMARE.”

This was carrying matters with a high hand, and required more than a passing thought. He folded the note and placed it in his pocket for further consideration.

In the course of the afternoon two or three young men of his acquaintance asked him if he was to be at Romare’s supper that evening, and expressed much surprise at his reply.

“He has told that you are coming,” said one. “He seemed to count on you as sure.”

“He knows better than that,” exclaimed Robert Dalton, in an excited tone. “That man has caused me trouble enough. More-

over, I never attend such suppers. You know that as well as I."

"I thought I knew it, but he seemed better informed on the subject than I could presume to be."

"He once had good opportunity for knowing my habits, but it is now six years since I have spoken with him. I have changed in that time."

"He told me that he saw you yesterday."

"That is true ; and he has seen me to-day, but I have not spoken with him."

The listener looked to him for an explanation. "When we parted, more than six years ago, I paid him five thousand dollars, which he had won from me at the gaming-table when I was too much under the influence of wine to understand what I was doing."

This revelation was received with a look of profound astonishment. "I am making this confession for your benefit," added the speaker. "You are doubtless stronger than I was, but it is safer to have no intercourse with such a man. If you sit with him at

supper this evening, you will be expected, sooner or later, to pay for your own entertainment."

"Do you know what Romare's business is?" abruptly asked his companion.

"Gambling," was the laconic reply.

"I know he gambles; but you would hardly call that business. It costs something to live and dress in the style he does."

"His victims pay the bills."

Robert Dalton was proverbially reticent in regard to what concerned his own personal interests; but in this instance he felt constrained to speak frankly.

Before evening nearly every young man who had received an invitation to Romare's supper had heard a report of this conversation; and, as a consequence, those whose presence was most desired sent notes of apology.

The host was too much a man of the world to betray his mortification; but the supper, which had been gotten up regardless of expense, was a failure, so far as its original design was considered.

Robert Dalton was closeted with his gardener that evening, and if Paul Romare had heard their consultation, he would at once have relinquished all hope of again bringing the young man under his power.

The gentleman who had heard his remark in the morning was sufficiently curious to ask its meaning. He soon heard a detailed account of the affair, and the young merchant occupied a higher place in his esteem than before.

Romare kept himself somewhat secluded, and at the end of a month Thomas reported that he had left the city.

Soon after this, Robert Dalton received a letter from him, threatening an exposé of his youthful career of vice, unless a certain sum of money should be remitted within a specified time.

The letter was shown to Mr. Trull, who read it, asked a few questions, and then said, "I should advise you to take no notice whatever of this."

"I do not intend to notice it," answered his

partner, "and I presume Romare will carry his threat into execution. I preferred you should hear it from me rather than a third person."

"I am very glad you told me. I have so much confidence in you at present, that I should pay little attention to reports of the past, but I shall now be able to speak more confidently to others, should an explanation be necessary."

This missive failing to elicit any response, another was soon sent to the young merchant, threatening disclosures which would consign him to the State prison, unless money should be forthcoming.

Romare was getting desperate. His usual luck had failed him, and he was ready to engage in any scheme which offered the slightest prospect of raising funds. He counted on the extreme pride of the man with whom he was dealing, and fancied that, while refusing to acknowledge him as an acquaintance, he had reason to think that he might yet fear him as an enemy.

Still no reply. Revenge prompted the retaliation which policy had threatened.

There were strange rumors afloat in regard to Robert Dalton. His mysterious absence was explained. Crimes of which he had never been guilty were attributed to him, and there were vague hints of a terrible life beyond the sea.

No one could trace this scandal to its author; but it was generally discussed, and at length reached the ears of Mr. Trull.

"That is one of Romare's stories," he said to a brother merchant, who, with a great show of disinterested friendship, had reported to him the gossip. "I can tell you all about it."

"So that is it," said the man, after listening to his companion's version of the matter. "I am glad to be set right, and will take care to extend the information."

There was some truth in the reports, as every one knew; enough to give them an appearance of plausibility, and annoy him at whose expense they were told. They might

affect his business reputation ; but this was of small consideration to him in comparison with their possible influence upon one whose good opinion was of more value than all his wealth.

His admiration for Alcey Dunn had increased until it was the ruling passion of his life ; yet he shrank from expressing this admiration in words. She seemed so infinitely removed from him by her purity and innocence that her presence was like an accusing angel. Never had his guilt appeared so great, and never had he so loathed his career of vice, as since he had made the acquaintance of the orphan sisters.

Alcey Dunn had achieved a great success in her employment, and was considering the wisdom of taking better apartments in a more desirable locality. Jennie was ambitious to aid her sister, and looked forward impatiently to the time, when she, too, could "make beautiful dresses."

Robert Dalton often wondered if this young girl could be induced to exchange her life of

toil for a home with him, where every want should be anticipated, and as often was he humiliated by a sense of her superiority.

He knew he was not worthy of her. Sensibilities once blunted by contact with vice never regain their original tone. Sin brings its own punishment. One may be *stronger* for sin repented and forsworn, but never *purser*.

These consideration deterred him from making any formal declaration of his regard; although she could not be insensible to his gentlemanly attentions. With Jennie he was on the best of terms, and through her was able to bestow many favors upon which he would not otherwise have presumed. There were always fruit and flowers in their home.

From the first, Rhoda Smith had treated Alcey as a friend, rather than a servant, and, after her uncle's decease, had seated her at the same table with her cousin and herself. There may have been no design in this, but it certainly afforded an excellent opportunity for the exchange of civilities.

Rhoda was not likely to be questioned in regard to her cousin, but, soon after Romare's stories were put in circulation, Mrs. Fulton called upon her, and insisted on going into the work-room, as she wished to consult Miss Dunn in regard to some trimming. While there, she mentioned the reports, and expressed great regret that such terrible things should be said.

The flushed face of her dress-maker attracted and riveted Rhoda's attention. Mrs. Fulton, observing her, said "You need not mind Miss Dunn. She has heard this talked of wherever she has been for the last fortnight. Moreover, she is too discreet to repeat what she hears. Of course none of Robert's friends will believe anything to his disadvantage."

Rhoda had not been mistaken in thinking Alcey Dunn unusually reserved in the presence of her cousin, and this reserve was now accounted for. Those terrible stories, partly true, and partly false, had done their work.

Robert Dalton saw this, felt it keenly, and

resolved upon an explanation. That evening he proposed walking home with the young lady. She objected, on the plea that she must make a call on the way.

"Then I can wait for you," was his reply ; "I have something to say to you, which must be said this evening."

Alcey Dunn made no more objections. She accepted his proffered arm, and walked on in silence. She must have forgotten the call to be made, for nothing was said in regard to it. Her companion made two or three ineffectual attempts to engage her in conversation, but his own thoughts were pre-occupied.

When they reached her room, she threw open the door, and invited him to enter. Jennie sprang to meet him, and commenced an animated description of a new book she had borrowed from James Burton. "He told me you gave it to him," she said. "So he thought you intended I should read it too."

For some reason Mr. Dalton was not so social as usual with his young friend, and she

soon asked if she could go into Mrs. Burton's room. Permission was granted, and then came an opportunity for the desired explanation.

I think neither could afterwards have told how this was commenced; and it does not matter. It is sufficient to know that it was commenced in such a manner as to fix the attention of the listener, and ensure her sympathy. He acknowledged that he had been fearfully reckless, but spared her the details of his dissipation. He told her of the influence of Romare, and the forgery committed to meet his demands. The letters recently received from him were shown.

While reading these Jennie returned, and Alcey, who never neglected her sister, asked to be excused for a short time. Then there was a low murmur of voices in an adjoining room, which imagination easily associated with words of prayer.

When Alcey came back she found her visitor sitting with shaded eyes, and his whole manner indicating suppressed emotion. "I

fear I have wearied you by this long confession," he said, looking at her earnestly, as he brushed away a tear. "Perhaps I ought not to have inflicted it upon you, but I could not endure to be misunderstood by one for whom I have so sincere a regard."

"I am very glad you have told me," she replied, frankly, while the telltale blush assured him that his regard was not wholly unreturned.

An hour after, they were sitting side by side, his arm encircling her waist, and his face radiant with happiness.

It suddenly clouded, as she said, "I cannot be your wife."

"But you love me," he replied; "you have acknowledged it with your own lips."

"And I acknowledge it again," she said. "My life has been so lonely that I could not but welcome such kindness as yours. Since I first met you I have lived in a new world."

Alcey Dunn was too good and generous to speak otherwise than truthfully to one who

had reposed such unlimited confidence in her. She had long known that the days spent in his house were the shortest and brightest; but she had not known, until that evening, how truly she loved him.

"Why, if you love me, do you refuse to be my wife?" asked Robert Dalton. "Do you fear to trust me?"

"No," she replied, emphatically. "But I promised my mother that nothing should come between me and my duty to Jennie. She has no one else to care for her."

"I really had quite forgotten Jennie," he responded, laughing, relieved to find that there was no more serious obstacle to his happiness. "You can do more for her as my wife than you can possibly do situated as you are now. She will, of course, have a home with us, and I fancy she will make no objections to having me for a brother. So it is settled," he added, sealing his words with kisses upon brow and lips.

Do my readers wonder if no doubt of the sincerity of his reformation crossed her mind?

Did she not hesitate to place her happiness in his keeping?

She did not then. She could not doubt with his eyes looking into hers, and his heart beating against her own. But when she was alone there came misgivings. Had she acted wisely? What would be her fate should he relapse into his former habits?

The night waned while such thoughts agitated her. The morning dawned, but brought no rest. Even the caresses of her sister failed to cheer her. She was taking counsel of prudence, who is often a stern monitor.

Unfortunately, as it then seemed to her, she was to spend the day at Mr. Dalton's, and Jennie was to accompany her. The first glance at her face assured Rhoda Smith that she was suffering either in mind or body, although she took up the sewing and endeavored to appear interested.

"My head aches," she said, at length, finding it impossible to work.

"You shall go to my room and lie down,"

said her friend. "I knew when you came in that you were not able to work."

"It will be better for me to go home," was the reply. "I can take the work with me and finish it there."

Rhoda would not listen to this, and after much persuasion Alcey consented to lie down for an hour or two. Jennie was troubled when she returned from her visit to the house-keeper's room, and found that her sister was not in her accustomed place. "She has looked as though she was going to cry ever since she waked up this morning," said the child.

Rhoda had not been blind to her cousin's interest in Alcey Dunn; and, supposing that he had spent the previous evening with her, she considered him, in some way, responsible for her apparent unhappiness.

At the breakfast-table he had seemed in jubilant spirits, but at dinner, missing the bright face he had expected to see, he looked serious.

In answer to his inquiries, Jennie told him

that sister had such a headache she was unable to work.

The pain must have been contagious, for he soon complained of a headache himself, and Rhoda laughingly declared that she was fearful of suffering in the same way. She thought she was beginning to understand something of the true state of things.

Jennie was invited to the library when dinner was over, and soon after she was by the side of her sister, holding a note which had been sent by Mr. Dalton.

While deliberating what reply to make to this, Rhoda came in, bringing a cup of tea and some light food. "You must eat, drink, and be merry," she said. "Jennie, you can go down and entertain Mr. Dalton, while I attend to your sister, and see that she obeys orders."

"He said I was to wait and take back an answer to his note," replied the child; "and he looked so sorry, I don't like to go without."

Alcey covered her face with her hands, crushing the note, and concealing her tears.

Jennie was astonished at this, and still more, when told to say to Mr. Dalton that her sister was in no condition to reply to his note. She did not need to be dismissed the third time, although her own eyes were dewy as she closed the door, and went slowly down the stairs.

"I cannot take what you have been so kind as to bring me," said Alcey, making an effort to speak calmly. "I am feeling better, and shall soon be well if you will allow me to go home."

"I will certainly allow you to go if you desire it, and will order the carriage at once," said Rhoda, uncertain what she ought to do or say.

"It is not necessary to do that. If some one will call Jennie, I shall soon be ready," replied Alcey, rising from the bed and commencing to arrange her disordered dress. "I hope you will pardon me for making you so much trouble," she added, directly.

"I should not be troubled if I could do anything to make you less unhappy," said

Rhoda. "I cannot see why you will be better off at home than here, unless you choose to be entirely alone, and fear that I shall intrude."

Just then Jennie's step was heard, and she opened the door to say that Mr. Dalton wished to see Miss Smith in the library.

There was no delay in answering this summons. She stopped only to assure herself that Alcey would not leave during her absence, and then hastened to meet her cousin,

He was pacing the floor with hurried steps. but stopped as she entered, and turned towards her a pale, anxious face. "Cousin Rhoda," he said, extending both hands to clasp hers, "do you believe a good, pure woman could ever be happy with such a wretch as I have been?"

This question was so abruptly and unexpectedly asked, that, for a moment, she was unable to reply. "I believe a good woman could be happy with such a man as you are now," she said at length.

"I know you trust me, but would any one

else? I love Alcey Dunn," he exclaimed, "love her with my whole heart, and to live without her would be worse than death. I have told her this, and I know she loves me in return, though not as I love her. I have no right to expect that. I did not intend to speak of this at present," he added, in a less excited tone; "but she is unhappy, and I must know the cause. Perhaps she fears to trust me. It would not be strange if she did; but I love her as few women are ever loved, and would devote my life to her happiness."

Rhoda trusted her cousin implicitly, and loved him with a true, sisterly love which prompted her to seek his happiness in all things. "It will be best for you to see Alcey and talk with her," she said. "If she loves you, she will, at least, give you her confidence."

"Can I see her?" he asked, quickly

"I think so," she replied, and went from the room.

Alcey Dunn was now ready to go home. "Cousin Robert wishes to see you before you

go," said Rhoda. "You will find him in the library."

The young girl looked at her friend as though seeking to read her thoughts, and replied, "I think he must excuse me, I cannot talk with him now."

"Then you must tell him so. I am not willing to return with such a message. You need not fear to trust him. You could not have a truer friend."

This decided her. She knew she could trust the speaker, and, bidding Jennie remain where she was, went down. Her light footfall caught the ear of him who was waiting, and he met her at the door.

No words were needed to assure him that his suspicions were correct. There was a sorrowful tenderness in her look which betrayed the struggle between feeling and judgment. She took his hand, but shrank from the caresses he longed to bestow. Something in her manner awed him, and he waited for her to speak.

Both were standing, and the silence was

becoming oppressive, when he drew forward a chair and begged her to be seated.

"Thank you, I must not stay," she found voice to reply; but the effort to say this seemed to quite overpower her, and she was obliged to accept the seat she had before refused.

Robert Dalton's tongue was now loosed, and he implored her to tell him the cause of her evident unhappiness. Her woman's nature yielded. She wept, but her head was pillowed upon his breast, and he kissed away her tears.

"You have not told me why you are so sad," he said, at length.

"How can I?" she murmured. "And yet I must, for all my doubts will return when you are away."

He spared her the necessity, anticipating all she would say, and replying without a word of reproach. He did not blame her, certainly not, when she told him how her early home had been darkened by the grief of her parents for an erring son.

"He was not my mother's child," she said; "but he was very dear to her, and she would have made any sacrifice to save him. It was through his dissipation that we became poor. Father spent most of his property for him, hoping to induce him to reform; but mother never complained of this.

"At last he was taken sick and no one thought he would live. When there was a change in his symptoms, the physician ordered brandy to be given as a stimulant. I shall never forget my father's looks as he asked if something else would not produce the same effect. 'Nothing,' replied the physician. 'Then it will be better for him to die,' said father, after a moment's consideration."

Alcey paused after relating this incident, but soon resumed her story. "I ought to have said before, that during his sickness brother Albert seemed penitent for his past life, and often asked my mother's forgiveness for the unhappiness he had caused her. He had always been a wayward boy, but he

pledged himself to refrain from all intoxicating drinks if he should recover. Father told him what the physician had said in regard to brandy. 'I can't take it,' he whispered. 'It would be better for us all that I should die, and perhaps that might not save me.' He died that night," she added. "Father lived but six months after, and then mother was left alone with Jennie and me. All the relatives blamed father so much for having spent his property for Albert, that mother preferred not to go back to them, and we lived by ourselves as well as we could."

Here her companion interrupted her, being unwilling that she should pain herself by recalling her more recent sorrow.

After all she had suffered, how could he expect her to put confidence in one who, by his own confession, had been far worse than the brother whose untimely death she mourned.

He could only assure her of his undying affection, and his firm purpose with God's help to persevere in his life of abstinence.

"It is more than two years since, alone with God, I pledged myself to this," he said. "I have been able thus far to withstand all temptation."

Most young girls in the position of Alcey Dunn would have been dazzled by the offer of such a home as was opened to her. Perhaps in all his acquaintance there was not another who would have bestowed a thought upon his past life, had she been asked to become the wife of Robert Dalton.

His wealth was sufficient to render him universally popular, setting aside his attractions of person and appearance. But here was one to whom his money seemed of small consideration. She could appreciate the elegances of a luxurious home; but they could never compensate for the want of moral integrity in him to whom she must look for her happiness.

Jennie grew weary of waiting; yet refused to lay aside her hat, lest she might not be ready when sister came. Two hours passed before she appeared, and then she

was in no haste to go. Finally, they went home in the carriage, its owner accompanying them, and this rewarded Jennie for the trial of her patience. The wooing thus commenced sped rapidly, although doubts would sometimes intrude to mar the peace of our young friend. These, however, were gradually dispelled as she became better acquainted with her lover, and saw how truly he was actuated by Christian principle.

The last month before her marriage was spent in the house which was to be her future home. Here Rhoda Smith helped her to sustain the ordeal of questions to which she was subjected by some of her patrons, assuring them that her engagement there was for an indefinite length of time.

The wedding was very quiet, and there were neither tears nor partings to sadden it.

Mrs. Fulton's aristocratic notions were greatly shocked to think that her nephew should marry a dress-maker, when he might have formed an alliance with one of the first families in the city. Her pride was also

wounded in another direction. She had a daughter, four years the junior of her wealthy cousin, and she had hoped he might install her mistress in the old mansion.

The object of these criticisms was too thoroughly happy to care for what was said, and, when the young couple returned from their wedding tour, there was no lack of congratulations. Mrs. Dalton was a beautiful bride, and wore her new honors with becoming modesty.

Rhoda Smith was nearly as happy as the bridegroom himself. This match was one after her own heart. Yet, about a month after the marriage, just as the bud and bloom of summer were beginning to beautify the earth, she astonished her cousin by proposing to return to the country, and find a home at Mr. Gray's.

"A home at Mr. Gray's!" he exclaimed. "This is your home. I thought you were happy here."

"And so I am," she replied; "but it does not seem my place now. Your wife and

Jennie are sufficient company for you, and I am doing no good here."

"Other people may think differently," he said. "You had better talk with Alcey about it, and hear what she will say. I shall never consent to such an arrangement unless convinced that your happiness demands it."

Alcey did not wait to be consulted. At the first intimation from her husband that Rhoda thought of leaving them, she went to her, and protested against any such plan. "You were my first friend here," she said, "and I depend greatly upon your judgment. A few weeks ago you said there was room enough for us all, and we would be a model family upon which the sun would delight to shine."

Jennie was distressed at the very idea of losing Aunt Rhoda, as she had learned to call her. Mrs. Hawthorne did not hesitate to say that it would be a disgrace to the whole family if master's niece was allowed to leave the house. If she chose to marry, and settle in another home, there was nothing to be said;

but the idea of going back to the country was too preposterous to be entertained.

A compromise was effected. Her cousin had neither the wish nor the right to control her movements, but he proposed that she should visit her friends during the summer, and return to the city in the autumn. "Perhaps we will all go up for a week or two, by and by, if Mrs. Gray will receive us."

Rhoda's preparations were hastened by the fact that her cousin would accompany her, for the greater part of the journey, if she could be ready within a few days. He had business in that direction which demanded immediate attention.

I must not linger over the incidents of this visit. My readers are already so well acquainted with the family of Mr. Gray that they can easily imagine the cordial welcome which awaited their friend, and the bright days which followed.

Judson Gray was now sixteen years of age, tall, robust, and manly, rendering great assistance to his father, yet having no taste for

the life of a farmer. He loved books, and it was his great desire to obtain a liberal education. This matter was under consideration when Rhoda Smith made her second visit, and she was immediately taken into confidence, and consulted in regard to it.

Mr. Gray was not a wealthy man, although he lived honestly and generously. The income of his farm provided for the wants of his family; but he could hardly afford the expense of a college course for his son, while doing justice to his other children.

Judson talked of "working his way;" but his father would not hear to it. He insisted that he would need his whole time and strength for study, and that a cultivated mind with a broken-down body was of small value.

Aunt Rhoda came to the rescue. She found Judson one day dreaming by the cold spring, and asked how long it would take him to fit for college.

"Two or three years," he answered. "I

might possibly be fitted in two years, if I had my whole time for study."

"What would be your expenses for a year?"

The boy had calculated these, many times, and was able to reply without hesitation.

"Is that all?" she asked, astonished at the smallness of the sum.

"I could live on that," was his reply. "At any rate, I should be willing to try, if I had the opportunity."

"Then get ready as fast as you can, and the money shall be forthcoming."

"Did father tell you so?" he asked.

"He has told me nothing about it; but *I* have told *you*. I will pay the expenses of your education myself."

"But —" commenced the boy, hardly knowing how to reply.

"There are no buts in the case," said his companion, interrupting him. "You wish to go to school, and I wish to send you. Help your father through haying, and by that time

your clothes shall be in readiness to leave home."

Having said this, she left the spring, and walked towards the house. Half an hour after, when Mr. Gray entered the room where she was sitting, she told him she had been making an agreement with his son which she hoped he would ratify.

"Judson has told me," he replied. "You are very generous; but it does not seem right for you to do this. I have been thinking to-day, that I would try to meet the expense myself."

"Let me do it," responded Rhoda, earnestly. "It will be a great pleasure to me. I wish to feel that I am doing some good in the world."

Mr. Gray made some objections, urging that her own wants should be first considered.

In reply to this, she told him what property had been left to her by her uncle, and the income she derived from it. "You see it will not require the least self-denial on my part," she said, in conclusion; and the matter

was settled, as had been usual in the family, by allowing her to have her own way. He also conceded her the privilege of performing this generous act without her agency being publicly known.

Rhoda Smith had been in the country but a few days, when she rode over to her cousin's, and found them more comfortably situated than she had expected. Their house was completed, with the exception of some upper rooms, which were not needed for immediate use. There was some new furniture, neat, though inexpensive, which gave an air of thrift and comfort to the home.

But greatest treasure of all was the baby, during whose short life only four moons had waxed and waned. She lay in her wicker cradle, and cooed sweet music for the mother's ears.

"I believe there never was another such a baby as this," said Samantha, exhibiting her darling; and the visitor was soon ready to express the same belief.

Reuben regarded his child with a mingling

of pride and tenderness which was really touching to behold. "Rather guess we shall call the baby Rhody," he said to his cousin.

The laugh with which this announcement was received startled the speaker from his usual gravity. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Such a name, for such a child," was the reply.

"Thought the name was a good one," said Reuben.

"It is good enough, but not pretty enough for this blue-eyed baby. It suits me very well, and is an old name in my Grandmother Dalton's family."

"Guess we'll let you find a name to suit yourself then."

"You might call her Amy. That would suit her exactly."

"So it would," said Samantha, "and perhaps she will be as good as Amy Hill."

"Amy Hill Smith." The infant smiled as the name was repeated, and raised her hands

to her father's face, while two tear-drops fell upon the pure white brow.

"It is wonderful how that man has changed," said Aunt Lizzie the next day, as Rhoda spoke of her cousin. "Since that child was born he seems to feel a new responsibility."

"He is doing well," said her son. "No man could do better, and I believe he is a true Christian."

"There is no doubt of that," replied Rhoda. "He never could pray as he did last night, if he were not. Samantha told me they were both to join the church at the next communion."

"Yes, and Dexter Rollins and his wife join with them; so there are two families saved. Lang has no hope of getting them back as customers. He says he don't want any praying folks about him."

"He is not likely to have them," responded Aunt Lizzie. "Praying and rum-drinking are not often found together in these days."

Rhoda was exceedingly anxious that Amy

Hill should see her namesake ; but she was forced to content herself with giving a description of the child, upon whom it was expected her mantle of goodness would fall. Samantha did not feel willing to leave home while so much needed to be done.

The first thing which attracted Rhoda Smith's attention, when she entered Mrs. Lunt's cottage, was an easy-chair of an entirely new construction. "It was my Christmas present from Mr. Rollins," said Amy. "He made it himself, and his wife covered it. I told him it was too good to stand in our kitchen and be used every day ; but he said that was just what he made it for. I sit in it all day, and hardly feel tired. Everybody is kind to me, and I have so little to give in return. I should sometimes feel burdened if I could not pray for my friends."

There were some new books upon the little stand. "Our good minister brought them," replied Amy to a remark made by her friend. "He thinks I should have a variety to occupy my time and thoughts. I always loved to

read, but my supply of books has been small. Now, I seem to want for nothing."

Thus, through the day there were grateful acknowledgments of kindness; and in the afternoon, when the good minister himself came in, and offered a prayer in her behalf, her heart seemed lifted quite above the earth.

Mr. Ashley, the clergyman, was very glad to meet Rhoda Smith, whom he had before seen, and of whom he had heard so much. He had formed an acquaintance with her uncle the previous summer, and having then conversed with him upon the most momentous of all subjects, he was interested to learn the particulars of his death.

This visit, with others which had preceded it, was numbered with the past, and Rhoda drove homeward, feeling that she had spent the day profitably as well as pleasantly. Her principal interest being at Mr. Gray's, she returned there, even while her cousins felt that she wronged them by leaving so soon.

A letter was soon received announcing the coming of Robert Dalton, with his wife and

sister, and, four days after, Amos, in a state of great excitement, reported that he could see "a span of horses and a big carriage only a little ways off."

The gentleman was welcomed as an old friend, and his charming wife soon made a place for herself in the hearts of those to whom she had come as a stranger. Jennie had been described and talked of until the children felt acquainted with her; so that their meeting was free from all restraint.

During the next three weeks, work and amusement were so thoroughly blended in this home, that it would have been difficult to draw a dividing line between the two. Rhoda took the cooking into her own hands, and then found herself surrounded with so many assistants, that her office was a mere sinecure. Alcey Jennie, Elsie and Mattie all went to her for orders, while Mrs. Gray was advised to keep out of the confusion.

Mrs. Dalton drove over with Rhoda to see Amy Hill, and spent a delightful hour at her side, each charmed with the other.

Three weeks passed like a dream, bringing the hour of departure all too soon. Rhoda, alone, remained, and set to work in good earnest to prepare an outfit for her boy, as she laughingly called Judson. No one who saw her thus engaged would have doubted that it was a pleasure, so nimbly flew her fingers, and so happy was the smile which illumined her face.

When everything was completed and packed in the trunk, which had been brought expressly for the young student, his father started with him for the academy, about forty miles distant, where he was to go through his preparatory course. Then the house seemed desolate indeed, even after Mr. Gray's return, and Rhoda prolonged her stay far into the autumn.

"I am sure you belong to us now," said Elsie, as she tried to persuade Aunt Rhoda to make her permanent home with them; but, despite her entreaties, and those of her parents, Christmas found their old friend in the city.

James Burton and Debby Butters were not the only children whose homes were brightened this year, by the generosity of Robert Dalton and his wife. They dispensed their favors right royally, imitating the example of the great Master.

James Burton had been permanently provided for, by giving him a situation in the store, with such wages as enabled him to assist his widowed mother. Debby Butters and her grandmother were living in pleasant rooms, where the child's health was rapidly improving. Rhoda no longer complained of idleness. She had sufficient to occupy hands and heart, and with each year, with interests in country and city, the number of her duties and pleasures increased. She developed into a noble Christian woman, using her wealth for the good of those about her. Old animosities were buried, and the world, which had once seemed to her so dark and dreary, was now a field for labor, yielding a rich harvest of happiness to those who sow with a liberal hand.

Clement Foster, standing alone in the moonlight, was the first character introduced to my readers, and, after the lapse of eight years, he again claims our attention. Most of the time, since Elsie placed a "light in the window for him" that winter evening, he had resided in a distant town, with an uncle who offered him better advantages than his father could afford to give him.

Whenever he visited home he was often at Mr. Gray's, coming and going as one sure of a welcome. He was fine-looking, genial in his manners, and agreeable in conversation. These qualities, combined with good business talents, made his success in life almost certain.

Of his principles little was known, and, indeed, but little thought had been bestowed upon them. An occasional visitor, upon his best behavior, if he had gross faults they were well concealed. At the age of twenty-two his father died, and, being an only child, it was necessary that he should remain with his mother for a few months, and settle her

business. This gave him an opportunity for prosecuting his acquaintance at Mr. Gray's. It was soon apparent that Elsie was the object of his special attention, and that her childish preference for the handsome, gallant boy was fast ripening into a sincere affection for the attractive young man.

Her father then began to study his character more closely, and was soon convinced that it was far different from what he should choose in a son-in-law. He found that his habits were not strictly temperate; and this alone was sufficient to condemn him.

He reported this to his wife, who, in turn, communicated it to Elsie. It produced, however, a far different result from what was expected.

"Aunt Rhoda has been telling you that," she exclaimed, forgetting, in her excitement, the respect due to her mother.

"She has said nothing to me about it," was the reply. "Your father told me, and he wished you to know it."

This called forth a flood of tears, but did

not seem to weaken her confidence in Clement.

In a few days Judson came home, and, with better opportunities for judging the young man, at once pronounced him on the wrong track. He talked with his sister plainly, telling her what he had seen and heard, and imploring her to break off an acquaintance which could only bring unhappiness. She could not doubt her brother's words, and they really seemed to have some influence; but the next time she met Clement Foster, he found means to reinstate himself in her good opinion.

Mattie, who was soon to be married to a worthy young man, with whom she had become acquainted while away at school, reasoned with Elsie, urging her, at least, to bind herself by no promises.

Rhoda, who was making her annual visit, knowing it would be useless for her to interfere, wisely forbore giving any advice; but she proposed that Elsie should spend the winter with her in the city.

Mattie having left her, it was a great privation for the mother to spare her last daughter from home; yet she consented, hoping new scenes might turn her thoughts in a new direction.

This visit only made her final decision more certain. She was charmed with the noise and bustle of the streets, so different from her quiet, country home, and the fact that Clement Foster was to settle in a large town made a union with him seem desirable.

But over and above all else was her love for him; not an ennobling love, founded upon esteem for moral worth and goodness, but a strange infatuation, blinding the eyes to all defects in its object. Had she considered calmly and dispassionately the facts brought to her notice, she would have been convinced that Clement Foster was no mate for her.

This she would not do, and, finding that further opposition would result in evil rather than good, her friends ceased to remonstrate.

At twenty she was married, and left her father's house a happy bride. At twenty-

five she was a drunkard's wife, and the mother of three children, who were worse than fatherless.

It seemed a rapid descent, but the downward career had been commenced before marriage. Elsie soon discovered this, and expostulated tearfully. She had miscalculated the man with whom she had to deal. He would not even listen to her. Arbitrary and selfish, consulting only his own ease and gratification, he had no regard for her happiness. The only possibility of peace was in submitting, without a murmur, to his caprices and dictation.

Upon this point her brother had particularly warned her; but she could not believe that one who then lavished upon her such extravagant expressions of endearment could ever command her sternly, enforcing his commands almost with blows.

His mother had died, thus leaving his father's property entirely in his hands, to be squandered in reckless dissipation. No business could prosper in such hands, and he

became deeply involved in debt. This only made him more reckless, and he often failed to provide for the daily wants of his family.

During the first two or three years of her marriage Elsie's friends visited her ; but their presence was so disagreeable to her husband, who was at no pains to conceal his feelings, that they thought best to avoid meeting him. She, meanwhile, had not been to her father's house ; one excuse after another had been urged to prevent, until she was so burdened with care and grief she had no wish to visit the home of her childhood. Her life would have seemed more wretched by contrast, and she could not bear an added drop.

She seldom wrote home, but, through an acquaintance residing in the same town, her brother heard of her destitution, and immediately went home to his father's to consult what was best to be done.

Judson was then settled as pastor over a large and flourishing church, repaying by his eloquent sermons, and still more eloquent life, the expenses of his education. With

Aunt Rhoda he was the king of preachers, while she was a welcome and honored guest, whenever she could be induced to tarry beneath his roof.

Fortunately he found her at his father's, and she offered to go to Elsie's herself, and see what *could* be done. He proposed accompanying her to the town, and stopping at a hotel, where he would be in readiness to assist in carrying out any plan which might be devised for the relief of his sister.

They set off at once, and, when they reached their destination, found it necessary to obtain directions to her place of residence. Rhoda went alone to the house, a one-story dilapidated dwelling, on the outskirts of the village, and there, in a scantily furnished room, she found the mother with her three children, the youngest but a few weeks old.

"Aunt Rhoda!" shrieked the poor woman, as she threw herself into the arms of her friend. "Thank God, you have come! We are starving!"

A glance around the room was misinter-

preted. "He has gone for the day," she said. "He will not be back until late at night; so there is no fear of him now."

The wailing of her infant recalled her attention, and, as she pressed it to her breast, she exclaimed, "Oh, if I had listened to my friends, I should never have been in this wretched condition! O Aunt Rhoda, take me away, and never let me look upon him again! He struck me this morning, when I asked him for some food, and we are starving."

"Starving!" repeated the listener, hardly comprehending the meaning of that dreadful word.

"Yes, starving," was the reply. "I am so glad you have come. Will you take me away?" asked Elsie, piteously.

"That is what I came for," replied Rhoda, "and, when I have brought you something to eat, we will talk about it."

She stayed for nothing more, but hastened back to report to Judson. He was waiting impatiently, and met her in the hall. "Take

your hat and come with me," she said. "I will tell you of Elsie as we go along."

"Dreadful! Dreadful!" he exclaimed, as he heard of her condition. "Who would have dreamed that such a fate awaited our darling Elsie!"

Food was brought for the starving family. Elsie, watching for the return of Aunt Rhoda, saw her brother as they turned towards the house, and uttered a cry of joy. She would have gone out, but her children were clinging to her dress.

Rhoda entered first, and, taking the babe from its mother's arms, managed to still its cries, while the older children were attracted by the tempting biscuits which were placed before them.

The sight quite unmanned the brother, who had looked on many scenes of distress, and thought he had learned to control his feelings. He folded his sister in his arms, — that sister, so changed he would hardly have recognized her, — and the hot tears fell upon her upturned face. He held her as he had

often done in the happy years gone by, while she wept unrestrainedly as a child.

"O Judson, dear, dear brother, take me, and never let me see *him* again! Will you?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes, Elsie, dear, I will take you home."

"Then let us go to-day, before he comes back, or —" She finished the sentence with a shudder. "Aunt Rhoda, please to give me some bread, I am ~~so~~ hungry."

The bread was given her, and then Rhoda desired her to be seated in a chair while Judson made a fire. "You must have a cup of tea," she said.

When this was ready, she looked about to see what packing needed to be done; and, after a short consultation, it was decided that only some clothing should be taken. Everything of value had been sold long before, and one trunk was sufficient to contain all that was worth carrying.

Judson made arrangements to have Rhoda, with his sister and her children, carried to the next town that afternoon, while he re-

mained to meet Clement Foster. When they had started, he walked back to the hotel, feeling that one part of his mission had been successfully accomplished.

At evening he returned to the deserted house. One, two, three hours passed, and the village clock struck twelve, when an unsteady step was heard, and he went out to confront one who had been his playmate and friend, but who was now his avowed enemy.

The interview was short and decisive. Judson Gray told his companion that his wife and children had left him, never to return, unless there should be an entire change in his conduct.

Too much excited to reply, Clement Foster rushed into the house, to assure himself that what he had heard was true. He was violent, at first, swearing that he would bring back Elsie, let the consequences be what they might. But he gradually retreated from this position, and listened in silence to the firm, uncompromising words of his brother-in-law.

We will not follow the wretched man to his lonely dwelling, as he flung back the advice he received with a curse.

The victim of his cruelty and neglect was safe. Eagerly she welcomed her brother the next morning, and heard the joyful news that her slavery (for by no milder term could her life be called) was at an end.

Home again weary and fainting; her children weak and puny. She begged the forgiveness of her parents for disregarding their counsel, promising to do anything if they would but give her a shelter.

It was a sad return,—too sad to have been borne but for the kindness and energy of Rhoda Smith. She took the children under her care, and, if it had been possible for them to gain health and strength, they would have done so, under her management.

Elsie was glad to leave them in her hands, and it soon became a necessity. She was taken sick, sinking into a kind of lethargy, from which it was difficult to rouse her. She seemed to sleep for most of the time; and it

was well that she did, as she was thus spared the anguish of witnessing the death of her two youngest children. The eldest, with more rigor of constitution, rallied from her debility, and had become a general favorite in the household long before her mother had sufficiently recovered to give her any particular attention.

Clement Foster's name was never mentioned in the family, and all allusion to him was carefully avoided. Judson Gray, however, kept himself advised of his movements. Through a third person he made an effort to reclaim him, but, failing in this, he was not surprised, at the end of two years, to hear of his death.

Elsie was then free, and she made no pretence of mourning for one whom she had long ceased to love, and whose very name was a terror. After this she regained something of her natural vivacity, and, when time had dimmed the memory of her unhappy experience, she gave her hand to one worthy of a true woman's love.

In all these years the intercourse between the families of Mr. Gray and Robert Dalton was that of well-trying friends. In the city home of the latter, there were bright, beautiful children, wisely and lovingly trained to choose the good and avoid the evil. The father, than whom there was no happier man, universally respected and esteemed, had banished from the minds of those around him all memory of his youthful vices.

Thomas Hawthorne and his wife were getting to be elderly people, yet they retained their position, more devoted, if possible, to the interests of their employers than when they were younger. Paul Romare had entirely vanished from sight, until one evening, when Thomas, visiting a sick man, as almoner of his master's bounty, learned that another sufferer was lying in an adjoining room. There, in the last stages of consumption, destitute of every comfort necessary to one in his condition, he found the gambler.

The next day Robert Dalton knelt by the bedside of the dying man, and commended

his soul to that God who has compassion on the chief of sinners.

"Can *you* forgive me?" asked Romare, in a hoarse whisper, when the prayer was ended. "I have sinned enough," he added, after being assured that all was pardoned. "I am thankful that I have not your soul to answer for. May God forgive my many sins!"

With these words upon his lips he died. The expenses of a respectable burial were paid by Robert Dalton, and he, with a few others, followed the poor body to its last resting-place.

And Aunt Rhoda, — what of her?

She lived to a good old age, unmarried, choosing as she said, with something of the old spirit, to live her own life, in her own way, yet by a large circle of younger friends she was loved and honored scarcely less than a mother.

It was her hand that wiped the death-damp from the brow of Amy Hill when her pure spirit struggled for release from its earthly

tenement, and it was her influence and assistance which helped to make the second Amy Hill worthy of the name she bore : —

“ Of out the fires of shame and sin,
God is able to garner in
A glorious harvest of souls ”

THE END.





JUL 78



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014660173

